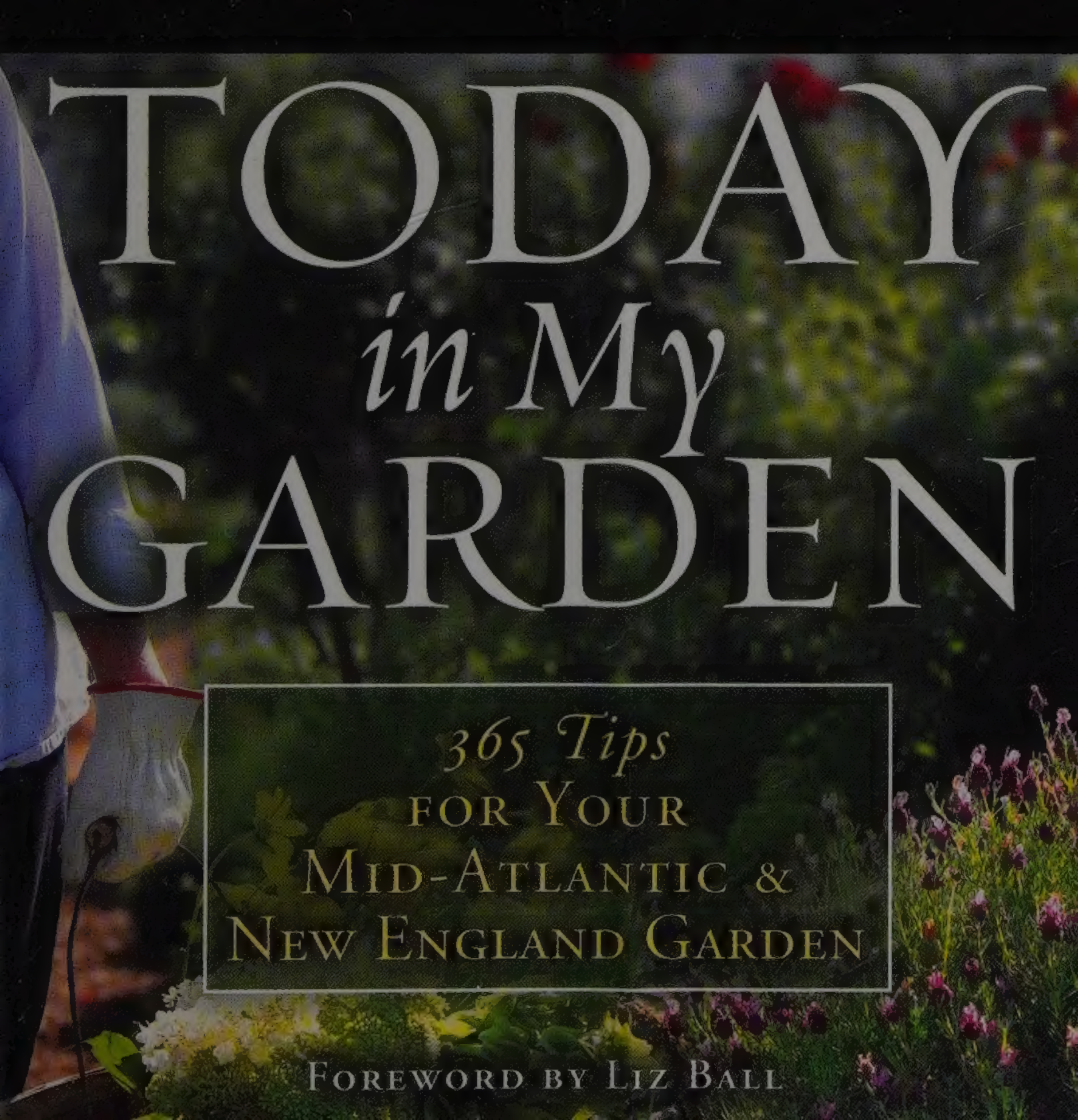

TODAY
in My
GARDEN
365 Tips
FOR YOUR
MID-ATLANTIC &
NEW ENGLAND GARDEN
FOREWORD BY LIZ BALL

TODAY IN MY GARDEN

365 Tips for Your Mid-Atlantic & New England Garden

Foreword by Liz Ball

Cool Springs Press
Franklin, Tennessee

Copyright © 2006, Cool Springs Press

All Rights Reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published by Cool Springs Press, 101 Forrest Crossing Boulevard, Franklin, Tennessee 37064

Dunn, Teri. Today in my garden : 365 tips for your Mid-Atlantic & New England garden / Teri Dunn; foreword by Liz Ball.
p. cm.
ISBN-10: 1-59186-339-2 (pbk.)
ISBN-13: 978-1-59186-339-7
1. Gardening—Mid-Atlantic States. 2. Gardening—New England.
I. Title. II. Title: 365 tips for your Mid-Atlantic & New England garden.

SB451.34.M52D86 2006
635.0975—dc22

2006028073

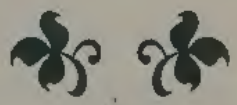
First Printing: 2006
Printed in Canada
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Visit the Cool Springs Press website at **www.coolspringspress.net.**

Never leave that
till tomorrow which
you can do today.

—*Ben Franklin*

CONTENTS



FOREWORD

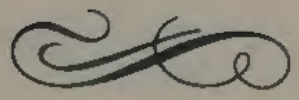
SPRING TIPS 1–90

SUMMER TIPS 91–180

FALL TIPS 181–270

WINTER TIPS 271–360

APPENDIX

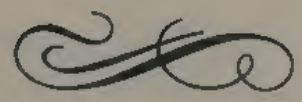


Everyday Tip

Get into the habit of keeping a garden journal. It's like a "baby album" for your garden. It is invaluable for jotting down notes about problems or successes, storing articles from newspapers or magazines, or attaching photos. It doesn't have to be fancy, but spiral binding, tabbed pages, and pockets are convenient. (It makes a great gift, too!)

FOREWORD

To be a gardener is to be deeply and joyfully in touch will the rhythms of nature. The imperatives of the seasons are constantly evident to us as we feel the soil for moisture, test the air for frost, check the windowsill for sunlight, and glory in each time of the year. Those of us who live in the Mid-Atlantic and New England states—the Northeast—are particularly sensitive to



the seasons, because we have four distinctive ones.

The weather cycles deliver predictable cold, then welcome warmth, significant heat, mild chill, then cold again. Each season challenges our understanding of how climate, wildlife, plants, and soil interact as a system in our yards. Each season mandates certain gardening activities, providing structure in our lives and pleasure in the wonder of the natural world.

This handy book is not intended to be a systematic guide, nor is it meant as a chore list to cause you stress because you have not accomplished the suggested gardening activities. *Today in My Garden* is designed to offer timely reminders to busy gardeners of tasks that may bring greater gardening success and enjoyment.

Gardening in the Northeast

We who live in the Mid-Atlantic and New England states enjoy many

gardening advantages besides four distinctive seasons. Because our part of the nation was long covered by the huge eastern deciduous forest, which for eons produced multitudes of leaves that decayed into soil, we enjoy generally good, loamy soil that is a bit on the acid side. Recent atypical climate events notwithstanding, we have also traditionally had generous rainfall, distributed fairly evenly over all months of the year.

A look at the USDA cold hardiness zone map reveals that the population centers in states from Pennsylvania and New Jersey north to Maine typically fall within zones 4 to 6. This means that we can grow an enormous variety of plants of all types—trees, shrubs, bulbs, annuals, and perennials. Those that are hardy only in warmer climes, we grow as houseplants! Be sure to check the zone map, found in almost any gardening book, to see exactly what zone

you live in. If you choose plants that are listed for that zone or warmer, you should have a good headstart for gardening success.

Working Together

Wherever you garden in the Northeast—mountaintop, valley, plateau, coastal plain—some basic gardening principles apply. They are corollaries of the idea of understanding the natural world and cooperating with it: Work with nature,

not against it. Honor and take advantage of the systems for nurture and propagation of plant life that are already in place; after all, they have been successful for ages.

Put the right plant in the right place. Learn your plants' needs and then meet them. Provide the right soil, moisture and light conditions. Give them room to grow to their natural size without your having to prune constantly. This will make them happy and stress free.

Care for the soil so it can care for your plants. Soil is alive. Its organic content—the soft, spongy part called humus—shelters thousands of microscopic fungi, worms, insects, and other organisms that process soil mineral nutrients into a form that plant roots can take up. So, use fertilizers that are safe for soil. These are typically granular products, organic or synthetic, that are labeled "slow-acting" or "slow release." Cover all bare soil to protect it from compac-

tion, drying out, and loss of its "living" organic content. Use organic mulches such as chopped leaves, wood chips, pine needles, or shredded bark. Or, plant living mulches—ground cover plants.

Look for the underlying cause of stress if a plant develops pest or disease problems. Environmental conditions—extreme heat, drought, change in light conditions, soil contamination—often promote stress in plants. People do too, with string trimmers, overuse of chemi-

cals, poor pruning, and other practices. Opportunistic pest and disease organisms are quick to take advantage of plants with impaired defenses. Their presence often signals a deeper an underlying problem

But most important of all is to enjoy today in your garden.

—Liz Ball

Spring

Everyday Tip

If you haven't already done so, sketch a map of your garden (it can be simple!) noting the areas that receive full sun, a mix of sun and shade, or full shade. Knowing this is invaluable to selecting the right plant, for the right spot.

MARCH

Tip 1

Although it's a little early to do a full rosebush pruning, you may attend to winter damage, if any. Go out and trim back obviously dead, snapped, or blackened growth. Be sure to use sharp bypass pruners so that you don't mash or twist the canes as you cut.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 2

Continue to nurture those little seedlings being raised indoors. In particular, you should feed them about every two weeks. Use a regular, balanced household fertilizer at about fifty percent of the recommended dilution. This nudges their growth along and gives the plants a boost in strength.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 3

If you left your ornamental grasses to dry last fall and collect snow over the winter—which always looks nice—now is the time when they start to look disreputable. Chop them down now to make way for new growth. Cut a few inches above ground level.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 4

You may now prune your fruit trees, while they are still dormant (that is, before buds show any green). Take out dead and winter-damaged wood, suckers, and branches that rub against one another. Thin the interior so it's not crowded or twiggy, and shape the tree overall.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 5

Watch for snowdrops and early crocuses. If mulch or lingering snow is hiding or smothering them, scrape some of it away so they can poke their heads up to brighten the scene. If a late snowstorm covers them, help them out again after the weather clears. They're amazingly resilient.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 6

Order bare-root roses, or buy them locally. These are dormant plants and look like a bundle of twigs, but are actually two-year-old, field-raised plants that the nursery has kept in cold storage over the winter. They often end up being healthier, huskier plants than the potted ones you see later in the season.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 7

If you have a cold frame, or have been thinking of making one, early spring is the perfect time to launch it. Little seedlings can be raised and acclimated in its shelter. Be sure to water seedlings in the morning so the foliage has a chance to dry before evening. Make sure it has ventilation on sunny days.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 8

Check on your stored indoor tender bulbs—glads, dahlias, and the like. Get rid of those that show signs of mold or rot, as well as any that are shriveled up. Brush off the dirt; then return the remainder to the storage bags or sacks. Sprinkle on a bit of fungicide powder if rot has been a problem.

❑ *Check when completed*

9

MARCH

Tip 9

Set out a rain barrel. This is a thrifty way to collect free water for your garden. You won't be able to move it later—it will be too heavy—so choose a spot where branches or buildings won't obstruct it, and where it won't be in the way. Place a screen over the top to keep out debris, bugs, dirt, and mosquitos.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 10

Here's an easy way to fulfill an ambitious plan for a splashy bed of annuals ("bedding plants"). Decide what you want, draw up a to-scale plan, and figure out how many plants you will need. Then contact a local nursery with a greenhouse and ask them to grow them just for you. Remember to specify colors.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 11

Take a peek at your pots of over-wintered tropical plants. Scoot back the straw or whatever mulch you have protecting them; then inspect the surface of the soil for signs of new life. If there are sprouts, you may remove the covering completely and water lightly. Provide light by placing them near a window or under fluorescent lights to encourage them.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 12

Thinking of refurbishing your lawn? Do research now on the kinds most suitable for your region and their conditions (full sun, part-day sun, some shade). Blends are a great way to hedge your bets in varied conditions. When you know what you want, buy bags of seed—or special-order them.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 13

It's time to undertake serious pruning of your grapevine, while it's still dormant. This not only keeps the plant healthy and helps it bear the best-tasting fruits, but keeps the harvest within reach. Cut off at least three-quarters of last season's growth, chopping all the way back to a handful of buds per cane. Sounds harsh, but it pays off!

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 14

Once snow has melted, take a walk through the yard with a wheelbarrow or big trash bag. Wear sturdy gloves, carry clippers, and bring a rake. Clean up last year's dead plant material wherever you find it. Also, haul out any debris or fall leaves that blew onto your property over the winter months.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 15

Impatient? Force branches of flowering shrubs into early bloom. Cut stems with swelling buds from forsythia, daphne, willow, flowering quince, or cornelian cherry. Split the base of the stems about an inch to increase water absorption. Arrange them in lukewarm water and keep them in a warm room.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 16

Some clematis vines need to be pruned now—the ones that you expect to bloom on new growth when summer arrives. Tug down last year's tangled, dried-up growth, cut it away from the plant, and cart it off. Then simply lop off all the stems to within a foot or so of the ground.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 17

Celebrate St. Patrick's Day with your own green carnations! Just buy some white ones, recut their stems, and put them in a vase of water to which you have added several drops of green food coloring. After a few hours, if the color is too light, take out the flowers for a moment, stir in a few more drops of food coloring, and return them to the water.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 18

Keep a close eye on your fruit trees. Before the buds begin to swell, you may spray branch surfaces with dormant (heavy) oil. To be effective, the temperature must be over 45 degrees Fahrenheit. This mainly helps to control scale, but it thwarts other pests, as well.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 19

Shop for new pots. The best selection is available early, before the crowds arrive. No matter how charming a container may be, don't buy it unless it has at least one drainage hole. (Alternatively, perhaps you can nest a smaller pot within it, or poke or drill a hole in the bottom.)

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 20

Check out the garden soil. It may still be too soon to plant much, but it doesn't hurt to get acquainted. Scoop up a handful and squeeze. If the dirt oozes moisture, it's too soon. If it forms a ball that breaks apart when poked by your finger, it's okay to sow early and cold-tolerant crops (like peas and radishes).

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 21

Try "layering" a lower branch on one of your rhododendrons. You may just end up with an additional plant, free and easy. While it is still attached to the mother plant, nick the stem, and then bury that part under the soil. With luck, new roots will form at the site of the wound.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 22

Rake the lawn. This gets out any debris, trash, straggling leaves, and weeds from last year. It also helps the grass stand up after months of being matted down, and lets in air and light. All this is conducive to getting your lawn off to a good growing season.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 23

Examine dead patches in the lawn if it's free of snow or ice. If they are round and pale yellow edged in pink, suspect snow mold. It's a grayish, stringy fungus that lives under the snow. You may have to treat the lawn with a fungicide; ask a lawn service or knowledgeable staffer at your garden center to recommend a product.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 24

Groom your perennials as they emerge from melting snow. If you didn't cut the tops back last fall, you should do this now. Tug out or extract dead stems that are tangled or collapsed on the ground. This way, the plants will have fewer obstacles as they start up their new season's growth.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 25

This time of year, if you're walking around in flowerbeds or the vegetable garden, tidying up and making plans, you should be careful. Partially frozen and wet soil is easily compacted or damaged by your footsteps. Lay down some planks to walk on; these redistribute your weight more evenly.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 26

As your spring bulb display commences, evaluate it. Did you plant enough? Do you wish you had more or different colors? Take notes now, while you're thinking of it; then tuck those notes into your calendar or gardening journal in the late summer or early fall pages (whenever you are likely to buy bulbs).

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 27

For extra color this time of year, buy some pansies. They're wonderfully cold tolerant and sturdy. Every year seems to bring more bright new colors and color combinations—have a little fun with single-color as well as mix-and-match displays, in the ground if it's workable, or in pots.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 28

If late-season snow is in the forecast, act quickly. Cover vulnerable plants with plastic, or even blankets if it's just for the night. Close the cold frame. Scoop mulch up and around the bases of perennials. Spray flowering and fruit trees with the hose if possible—a coating of water helps.

❑ *Check when completed*

MARCH

Tip 29

Deadhead spent bulb flowers promptly. There's no reason to keep them; if you did, the plants would try to expend valuable energy forming seeds. Plus, removing the flowers keeps your displays looking tidier and fresher longer. A good way to do this is to go out and pick bouquets for the house.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 30

Pre-sprout potatoes so they'll have improved chances of success when you plant them in the ground later on. Choose good, firm ones, free of blemishes and rot. Simply spread them out on a tray—not touching one another. Set the tray in a sunny, warm indoor location.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 31

What's digging up your tulips? Some sort of hungry little rodent, no doubt, probably squirrels or mice (not moles—they're carnivorous). Gather up survivors and replant them; then try sprinkling some smelly dried blood around the bed or laying evergreen boughs over the plants until they are about a foot tall.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 32

Mail-order nurseries that ship bareroot perennials may send your order about now. Always open the package immediately and inspect the contents. Assuming everything looks okay, you may hold them in the fridge or other cold (but not freezing) spot until you are ready to plant them. Sprinkle a little water on them every few days.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 33

Prune deciduous trees and shrubs. They've been dormant all winter and are waking up. Buds are swelling; new growth is just starting. The plants will bounce back from cuts made now because they are so full of energy. Use sharp clippers or loppers. Remove branches that rub together or mar the symmetry or appearance. Thin out interiors.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 34

Prune your rosebushes while they are still dormant. This is the time to take out any remaining damaged canes, as well as crowded and crossed stems. You may then shorten undamaged canes in order to shape the plant—but never by more than one-third at any one time.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 35

Always make pruning cuts on an angle. That way, water will be more likely to run off, rather than collecting on the cut area and causing rot or disease. A slanted cut also dries out faster after a rain. Last but not least, this leaves a smaller stub, which is better for a plant's appearance.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 36

Evaluate the shape of your needled evergreens. If there are branches jutting out at odd angles, early spring is a good time to get rid of them. Don't just shorten them as much as needed, or you'll be left looking at an ugly stub. Instead, prune down low, within the plant, and no one will be the wiser.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 37

As any remaining snow melts and the yard comes to life, clear out the lawn, flowerbeds, and vegetable garden before you get too busy and before plant growth covers everything. Get rid of rocks that may have risen to the soil surface; rake out gravel and sand that might have been shoveled or pushed in.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 38

Thinking of moving a shrub or small tree to a new location? Early spring is a great time to do this, while the plant is still dormant (so it won't be traumatized). When it does start growing, it can direct all its energy into a great show. Just be sure the soil is workable before undertaking this project.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 39

Get in the habit of forming a basin around every plant you install or move. It should be around the perimeter of the plant's canopy "drip line" (the outer edge). Mound soil up a few inches in a circle around the plant's root zone. Then, when you water, it will go straight to the roots. A basin also holds mulch well.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 40

Make a holding or "nursery" area in a sheltered part of your yard. Clear it out, define its boundaries with a low fence or some rocks, and put in some organic matter. You can temporarily plant ("heel in") bare-root shrubs, trees, and rosebushes here until they are ready to go into their permanent home.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 41

Are deer an ongoing problem? Their destructive dining can be even more frustrating this time of year, when they go after young, emerging plants or ones you've just installed. Various repellents can work, but if those deer are relentless and you mean business, you need an 8-foot-tall fence around your garden.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 42

Trim your evergreen hedge before it really starts growing for the year. Remove old stems at their bases. Shorten others that are too long. Shape so that the top of the plant—when viewed from the side—is narrower than the base. This not only looks better but is easier to maintain.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 43

Be on the lookout for seedling trees. They can pop up anywhere in the yard, but are a problem where you've put a mulch of chopped-up fall leaves. These pests can elbow out plants you want, while hogging water and soil nutrients. It's tedious, but you'd best yank them out or cut them down with a sharp hoe.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 44

Spring is a fine time to remove a tree limb. Assuming it's not too thick or too high up, you can do this yourself with a good sharp handsaw. Use the three-cuts method: an undercut halfway up; an overcut a bit farther out and halfway down (at this point, the branch snaps right off); then a neat final cut at the collar to finish.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 45

Want to rejuvenate your thin-stemmed rhubarb? Here's what to do. Every three or four years, when the first buds emerge, dig up, divide, and replant the clumps. Feed the transplanted pieces with a high-nitrogen fertilizer now and then intermittently over the summer. (Then resist doing any harvesting until the next year.)

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 46

Photograph your spring bulb displays when they are at their best. It's fun to admire what you've done, but there is a practical benefit, as well. You can refer to these photos in the fall, when you may want to improve or revise the show and need help remembering what was growing where.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 47

If snowfall has been light over the winter months, the ground may be rather dry deep down. So once you are sure the soil has thawed, haul out the hose and soak your shrubs and evergreens. This rehydrates their root systems and will help them get off to a good start.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 48

Now is the time to start removing winter mulch—compost, straw, salt-marsh hay, some other organic material, whatever you laid down last fall—from your flowerbeds. Wait until the air temperatures are consistently at or above freezing. Remove it gradually. Use your hands, a rake, a leaf blower, even some strong blasts from the hose.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 49

Plants you've ordered by mail that arrive in pots must be unpacked right away. Remove all packing material, plastic wrap, and soil collars, and give them a good soaking. If you're not ready to plant them, just keep them in a cool, sheltered spot for up to a week or so.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 50

To plant bare-root perennials, wait until the ground outside is workable and not soggy. Dig a generous hole, scoop in some organic matter, and scrape the sides—all this is to help the roots establish themselves in their new home. Set plants at the same level they were growing in the pot, backfill, and water well.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 51

Protect newly planted perennials from sun and wind. Some judiciously placed lawn chairs can help, as can cardboard boxes, pieces of plywood, or polyspun row cover fabric. The idea is to shelter the plants and keep them warm while they try to adjust and "get their legs under them."

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 52

Are you growing edible fruit trees, like plum or peach? Have you noticed the crops for some years are big, and other years are disappointing? Early spring is the perfect time to intervene to make things more even and predictable. If this is a good year, thin the fruits. Pick off and dispose of half the fruit while it is still tiny.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 53

Try raising your own salad mix! Seed companies call these blends "mesclun," and they often contain a range of lettuces, as well as other tasty edible leafy greens. Sow in moist, well-drained soil, and lay down a row cover (it shields them from a late frost, plant pests, and hot sun). They grow rapidly.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 54

Manage your mint. This tasty herb, unfortunately, starts to grow rampantly as the soil warms up. So act early. Dig up and discard sprouts growing where you don't want them. Confine the rest in a bottomless plastic container (such as a gallon milk jug), pushed down into the ground around the clump.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 55

Buy a watering wand. It attaches to the end of a hose and delivers a softer, soaking spray that is ideal for watering seedlings and new transplants without knocking them over. Look for one that has a handy thumb-operated on-off valve. Some models have several settings, so you can choose from mist, gentle shower, or jet spray.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 56

If you are planting a peony (or other bushy perennial), or have one that is just emerging, set a peony ring over it sooner rather than later. This metal support—available in garden centers and from mail-order sources—prevents flopping, and better displays the gorgeous, heavy-headed blossoms. The growing plant will hide the support.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 57

Protect small plants from weather or pests with "cloches." You can buy fancy glass or plastic models but homemade ones work fine. A gallon plastic milk jug is a favorite, as are plastic soda bottles. Cut off one end and push it into the ground over the plant. Cloches of any kind also keep your plants a bit warmer, a nice plus.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 58

If a deer fence is not practical for your yard, you may have some luck discouraging deer with repellents. You'll find plenty of spray products sold for this purpose. They ought to be replenished after a rain. Or suspend—on string or twine—bars of scented soap from branches. (Irish Spring and Lifebuoy are particularly intense.)

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 59

If you have not done so yet, fertilize your rhododendrons when they are blooming. Because they prefer acidic soil growing conditions, use a slow-acting fertilizer especially intended for them. Follow the instructions about amount on the label. If you water the plants before and after feeding, the dose will be most effective.

❑ *Check when completed*

APRIL

Tip 60

Tuck some colorful annuals in and among your bulbs. If you do this while the bulbs are in bloom, not only does the display look brighter, but also you won't inadvertently be digging into the bulbs or their root systems when you add flowers later. Good companions include pansies and primroses. They hide the dying bulb foliage, too.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 61

When picking daffodils for bouquets, cut a long piece of stem. Once inside, though, do some trimming. There's a pale green or white section at the very base of every stem; this should be cut off, as it won't take up water. One other thing—pick only a few from each clump, so you can still enjoy an outdoor display.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 62

Tidy perennial beds. Once the mulch layer is off, go into the garden with a pair of clippers. Cut all remaining dead stalks from last fall down to the crown of the plant. As you work, tread carefully—if the ground is still semi-frozen or saturated with water, your footsteps can compact the soil.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 63

Spread compost. Whether store-bought or homemade, it is always beneficial for your garden, especially early in the season. Because compost is sometimes still decomposing, it generates some heat, a hedge against springtime's temperature swings. Sprinkle to a depth of 1 to 3 inches, broadcasting it by hand, or with a trowel or shovel.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 64

Install edging around beds and lawn areas. Take a look at the choices at the home-supply store or garden center: metal, brick, cedar shakes, plastic, concrete, and stone. Whatever you decide, it's a good idea to dig a trench. This not only defines your line and holds the edging, but should help keep encroaching plants at bay.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 65

After danger of frost is past and soil has warmed, you may plant your summer bulbs—such as dahlias, galtonias, and glads. These like organically rich, well-drained soil and a spot with plenty of sunshine. Also, assuming you are growing the tall kinds, place them where they won't block other plants from view.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 66

Deadhead—that is, clip spent blooms off your spring-blooming shrubs (such as lilacs, spirea, rhododendrons, and azaleas). Be careful and thorough; get the back of the plant, and use a ladder or chair to get high flowers. Deadheading helps the plants conserve energy; plus they look a lot better.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 67

Buy some ear plugs.. Garden equipment that you will soon be using—whether lawn mower, rototiller, or chainsaw—is noisy. Indeed, some machines can hit 100 decibels, which is harmful if we subject ourselves to the din repeatedly. Wearing protection is also a nice way to signal that you want to be left alone to concentrate on your work!

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 68

Leave fading bulb foliage to receive sun so it can send nutrients to fuel next year's show down into the bulb below. The leaves will yellow and flop, and no, the process isn't pretty. Bending over handfuls and cinching them with a rubber band has no benefits, though it may look slightly better.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 69

Don't rush a corn planting—the seeds languish or even rot in cold, damp ground. Wait until the soil has warmed up. Plant an inch or two deep; shallower plantings tend to sprout faster because they are nearer to the ground surface, which is warmer. Always sow more than you think you'll need; you can thin later.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 70

If a bed or vegetable garden has not yet been planted, try some preemptive weed control. Cover the area with black plastic, and weigh down the edges with rocks or bricks. Leave the plastic in place as long as you can. Weeds are among the first plants to sprout in spring, and this suffocates many of them early on.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 71

Damp spring? This means mosquitoes will soon be out in force, making yard work miserable. Do what you can now to prevent a population explosion. Dump out or upend pots, tires, and other water-holding areas. Toss soil or sand over puddles. Add guppies to a garden pool—the fish will dine on mosquito larvae before they can hatch.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 72

If you've been meaning to get a clematis, springtime is ideal because plants are typically sold bare root and dormant. Choose a bright spot, with moist, fertile soil. After planting, mulch the base with several inches of compost or other organic matter, because clematis roots like to be moist and shaded. Install a support or trellis at planting time.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 73

Little groundcover plants are for sale now. But do your homework—is your intended site sunny or shady? Do you want something that flowers? Then prepare the spot, clearing it out and adding organic matter. Don't set the plants too close together; they will fill in. In the meantime, lay down mulch to keep the soil moist and prevent weeds.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 74

Start "hardening off" seedlings you've raised indoors. This means gradually adjusting them to outdoor conditions. Put them in a somewhat sheltered spot, keep them watered, and bring them back inside if a late frost threatens. (If you instead move them straight from the house into the ground, they really struggle, so don't skip this step.)

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 75

It's easy to plant a small tree or shrub; you can do it before lunch. Dig an ample hole. Have some organic amendments on hand to mix with the native soil for shrubs. (Trees need ordinary soil.) Set the plant into the hole, check that it's straight and is above soil level. Then backfill and tamp the soil down gently. Water well and mulch.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 76

Once your spring-flowering shrubs are finished blooming, you may go out and prune and shape them. Don't wait too long; they will soon start developing buds for next year's show, and you don't want to trim those off. Now is the time. While you're at it, do some thinning—the plants will look better and be healthier as a result.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 77

A containerized rose can be planted anytime from mid- to late spring. Dig a hole bigger than the pot, and have some extra organic matter ready to add to it as you plant. Ease the rose out, and loosen dense roots with your fingers. Replant at the same level it was in the pot, water well and mulch.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 78

Fertilize your shrubs throughout the yard. Use a balanced slow-acting granular fertilizer for nursery plants for consistent nutrition over several months. It's a good idea to soak the plants, right at their bases, before and after, so the food reaches the roots. (This isn't as necessary if the weather has been rainy.)

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 79

The first time to feed your roses is after they have already leafed out and flower buds are beginning to swell and show a bit of color. Special fertilizers are sold for roses, but you can also use an all-purpose, slow-acting granular formula. Scratch it into the soil and water it in.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 80

Repair your lawn chairs! First, remove any broken or frayed webbing. Then buy a roll of nylon webbing at the hardware store—matching it in terms of width and color. Cut it to length, weave it through the existing bands, and fold the ends to reinforce the pressure points. Then secure the ends with snug-fitting screws.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 81

A big pot need not be super-heavy. Don't fill it completely with potting soil when the plants within use only a few inches' worth. Instead, put a layer of foam peanuts in the bottom first. Nobody will know, the plants will be fine, and you'll be able to pick up the pot and move it if you want.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 82

If your area's last frost date has passed and the soil temperature is above 50 degrees F., you can set out tomato seedlings, in the ground or in tubs or pots. If the weather is cooler, drape plastic over them overnight or use a Wall-o-Water™. Set plants a little deeper than they were in the pot or flat—new roots will develop from the stems and help anchor them.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 83

Aerating can improve compacted soil under your grass. Rent a core-aerating machine to punch 3-inch holes into the grass, and to pull up the plugs of soil at regular intervals. This lets water and air into the soil. As the soil cores dissolve over the next few rains, organisms in the soil regenerate and turfgrass improves.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 84

Decorate a lamppost! Wrap it with a 4-foot-tall, slender piece of chicken wire, overlapping the ends and cinching them tightly in place (use wire cutters rather than your fingers—it's easier on your hands). Then plant a climbing vine right at the base. By midsummer, foliage and flowers will hide the wire and the post will be a pretty sight.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 85

Divide overgrown perennials, ones in large clumps, or ones that seem to be less productive every year. Dig up the clumps and divide into sections. Discard the centers and save the outer sections—making sure each piece has a good clump of roots and some emerging green growth. Replant, evenly spaced, and water well.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 86

Got dandelions? Don't let them go to seed! Even if you lack the time and energy to dig up each plant by the roots (remember, these have very long taproots), at least remove the furry yellow flowers before they become white balls of drifting seeds. A pass of the lawnmower should do the trick.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 87

Start a strawberry patch in a sunny site. Since strawberries have shallow roots, the soil should be loose and free of rocks to a depth of several inches. Add a couple of inches of organic matter, then plant. Allow each plant about a square foot of space; set the crown just above the soil line.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 88

Weed with a sharp hoe. It's a quick and easy way to dispatch a crowd of young weeds, which is what you get this time of year. Keep your strokes shallow, though—you don't want to harm the roots of the desirable plants or bring more weed seeds to the surface.

❑ *Check when completed*

MAY

Tip 89

Fill a windowbox. First make sure any remnants of last year's show have been scraped out. Put in fresh potting soil. Arrange the pots of plants atop the soil first, and shift them around if you wish—sort of a dress rehearsal. Then plant them at the level they were in the pot, add slow-acting granular fertilizer, and water thoroughly.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 90

Do poppies make poor bouquet flowers? Not true! It's just that sap dripping from the cut ends fouls vase water. Use the florist trick. Pick them in their full glory (or slightly before) and seal the cut ends: Dip them in boiling water for 30 seconds, or singe the ends with a candle or match.

❑ *Check when completed*

Summer

Everyday Tip

Enjoy your garden.
In the midst of chores and
to-do lists, you might overlook
why it's such a pleasure. Sit outside,
read a book, take a stroll, snooze
in a hammock, have a
party—reap the rewards.

Tip 91

Plant some annuals now that both air and soil are warm enough. But avoid the temptation to buy blooming plants—the transition from their pampered life at the garden center to your yard may cause them to drop their petals. They'll recover, of course, but it's smarter to buy annuals with plenty of good buds.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 92

Keep watering your small transplants. Remember: Too much water and the roots will rot, but too little and they will be stressed—possibly to the point of death. Water to soak the soil, and let it dry out between waterings. Morning is the best time to water.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 93

Head off lawn-mowing challenges by displaying your birdbath, sundial, garden bench, or other décor up on paving blocks. Seat the paver securely in the ground. Don't forget to check that it's level (this is particularly important if you are using more than one to support a single item).

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 94

Zap weeds in the cracks of your sidewalk, walkway, patio, or driveway, one by one, safely. Just fill a spray bottle with white vinegar (with a few drops of dish soap to contribute stickiness) and hit each one with a strong blast. If the weed isn't dead in a day, spray it again . . . it should succumb.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 95

Keep cats from treating your flowerbeds like a litter box! One way to do this is to lay down some chicken wire and cover it lightly with soil or mulch—they don't like the way their paws get snagged. Alternatively, try sprinkling an unpleasant-smelling repellent around: hot pepper, black pepper, citronella oil, even coffee grounds.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 96

Pull weeds out by the roots. They compete with your plants, especially the new and smaller ones, hogging valuable resources of soil nutrients, water, and sunlight. Often they harbor insects and plant diseases, too. Note that it is much easier to get out the entire weed when the ground is damp, after a rain or shortly after you've watered.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 97

Remove diseased; infested, or dead leaves from ornamental plants whenever you see them. Don't let them just fall off and hang around the base of your plants, where they can harbor and encourage problems. Get that stuff out—way out. Don't even toss it on your compost pile. Send it away with the household garbage.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 98

Cut back stems of young mum plants by one-third, now and in July. Though it seems brutal, this operation causes them to grow shorter but bushier (left alone, they can get leggy and fall over). They will bloom a bit later as a result, but the plants will stronger and at their peak in fall.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 99

Time to remind your forsythia bush who's boss! Once all the flowers have faded, the branches will elongate like crazy until the plant is way out of bounds. While this is not a plant for a clipped and formal look, it will look better (and grow more densely) with an early summer haircut. Use sharp pruners and cut individual branches for a natural shape.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 100

Mulch around the bases of your perennials, or renew depleted mulch. The weather's getting warmer now, and the soil dries out faster; a good mulch layer really helps retain moisture. Be careful, however, not to push the mulch flush up against the stems or crown of the plants and trees, which can invite rot.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 101

If you weren't happy with the location or numbers of some of your spring bulbs, it is safe to dig them up and move them elsewhere in the yard. Their foliage should have died down by now, or nearly so, and thus they should be practically dormant—an optimum time to make your move.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 102

Like your evergreens neat? Trim now, clip or shear back new growth (the candles, in the case of pines) before it is fully expanded. Don't make severe cuts, just shaping ones, at this time. This also helps keep evergreens in bounds and inspires them to grow more densely.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 103

Check on established vines as well as ones you planted this year. Most are surging into growth. If you don't intervene sooner rather than later, and direct the stems where you want them to go, the whole display can get out of control pretty quickly. Train and tie elongating branches onto their support with strips of soft cloth.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 104

When watering shrubs, rosebushes, and trees, a slow, deep soaking is better than occasional lighter sprinklings. Set the hose at the base of the plant, at a slow trickle, and come back in an hour or so. Check with a trowel or a houseplant water meter probe to see if moisture has penetrated several inches. If not, water for another hour or until you are satisfied.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 105

Patch bare spots in your lawn. Rake debris and then broadcast perennial ryegrass seed as evenly as you can. Sprinkle a dusting of slow-acting granular lawn fertilizer, then a thin layer of soil over the seeds. Water gently with a sprinkler today, and daily until the grass has sprouted and is growing well.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 106

Tall-growing perennials often benefit from staking—foxgloves, hollyhocks, verbascums, penstemons, and delphiniums, to name a few. If you didn't insert a wooden or metal support at planting time, it's probably not too late. Just poke the support securely into the ground close by, and attach the plant to it at intervals with soft ties.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 107

Spend some time grooming your annuals, whether they are growing in pots, in a windowbox, or in the ground. Remove spent flowers, and pinch off yellowing or damaged leaves. This not only helps the plants look nicer, but keeps them healthier and inspires continued bloom production.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 108

Nip insect-pest problems early. When you see harmful bugs or beetles dining on your flowers or in your vegetable garden, handpick and toss them in a bucket of soapy water. If you don't know their identity, look them up in a gardening book or show a sample to someone knowledgeable so you can learn how to fight off infestations.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 109

Move potted houseplants outside to a patio or deck for the summer months. The fresh air and bright sunshine will do them good. But make the transition gradual. If they get too much sun at first, you'll observe brown patches on the leaves which is, yes, sunburn. Better to set them in part-day sun at first and see how they do.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 110

Pick some edible flowers (unsprayed, of course)for a summer meal! Chives, nasturtiums, and pansies can all go in a salad. You can mix calendula petals or lavender flowers in soft butter for a unique, tasty spread for bread or crackers. Rose petals and bee balm blossoms are a pretty addition to a fruit punch.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip III

Create a focal-point planting. First, select a big, dramatic, or unusual pot or urn. To make it stand out further, elevate it on a support (a pedestal, overturned pot, or stack of bricks). Then fill it with enough plants so that it can be admired from any angle. Pick colors that contrast with the surroundings so it automatically captures attention.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 112

Spruce up dull plantings with plants that have colorful leaves. These will maintain garden excitement even as flowers around them cycle in and out of bloom. Some good choices are caladium, coral-bells, coleus, elephant's ear, sweet potato vine, and tricolor sage. Variegated-leaved geraniums, lamium, nasturtiums, and ivy can also do the trick.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 113

Make a mini water garden in a tub or kettle. It must be 18 inches deep to host a potted water lily (ask the nursery about ones that do well in smaller quarters). Or try other attractive aquatics, both floaters and tall ones like irises, papyrus, and taro. Full sun is best. Top off the water when it evaporates a bit.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 114

When weather starts to get hotter, watering often, and enough, can become a real chore. Get some soaker hoses and thread them through the flowerbeds, ground-cover area, vegetable garden, or any other spot that needs regular moisture. For these, as well as for sprinklers, consider investing in a timer that installs at the faucet.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 115

Improve hose-watering in general. First of all, you get what you pay for—cheap hoses crack and leak after a while. Spend a little more on a rubber hose, or a "professional duty" nylon/PVC model. Buy some hose guides so you don't drag the hose over plants. And always store your hose inside, or at least in the shade.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 116

Mow the lawn less often during dry weather spells. When you do mow, set the mower blades higher to help keep the grass green and allow grass blades to shade out low-growing weeds. (Taller types tend to develop deeper roots.) Don't bother with raking—if you mow often, the clippings will be small enough to break down on site.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 117

Algae problem in your birdbath? Assuming you've cleaned it (a mixture of equal parts of vinegar and water works well and is nontoxic for the birds), there's one other thing you can try. Pick about six stems off your lavender plant, wrap them with a rubber band, and float the bundle in the water.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 118

Deadhead both annuals and perennials. That is, pinch or cut off spent flowers promptly. Otherwise, the plants may be tempted to spend a lot of energy going to seed and the flower show will end. This way, you persuade them to redirect their energy into making a fresh round of flowers.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 119

Remember your hanging baskets! In warm summer weather, they dry out amazingly quickly. Use a watering wand and soak thoroughly in the mornings. A "mulch" of damp moss, an inch or so thick, arrayed over the soil surface helps retain moisture between waterings. Just scoot it aside when watering and reposition it after.

❑ *Check when completed*

JUNE

Tip 120

Have your marigolds turned to lace? If so, suspect slugs. Go on a night safari to see what's eating them. If it is slugs, try the beer trick. Place a shallow dish filled with stale beer by the plants; by morning, any slugs attracted to the beer will be drowned or too drunk to care.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 121

Pick bouquets often! It's one of the great rewards of gardening; plus the very process of going out and selecting flowers compels you to examine—and enjoy—your plants as you go by. Bring a water bucket and plunk in the stems as you go. This keeps everything fresh until you get inside, where you can groom and shorten each stem.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 122

If you haven't already, clip off all spent, browned lilac flowers. They really detract from the appearance of the plant, and they drain energy from it as they attempt to go to seed. If you don't do this, they'll hang around all summer and all winter and detract from next spring's glorious purple or white show.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 123

For July Fourth, make a patriotic flower display. Get some red or blue pots. Then fill the red ones with blue and white annuals, and the blue ones with red and white flowers. Group them together—on the front steps to welcome visitors or to the side on the patio or deck—where they can be admired.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 124

In your shade garden, as the ground gets drier, bleeding heart, corydalis, and other early-flowering perennials tend to throw in the towel. Flowering is done, and the stems and leaves start to yellow. There is no reason to watch and wait. Take sharp clippers and cut everything down to the ground. Don't worry; the plants will return in glory next spring.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 125

Beat the heat for your potted plants. Hard surfaces such as the patio, deck, or steps absorb a lot of solar energy (especially dark or brick surfaces), which is radiated back with a vengeance and can literally bake your plants. Watering helps, but you may also have to temporarily move pots to the edges or to somewhat shadier settings.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 126

Keep after those weeds! Knock down carpets of smaller ones with a hoe—make sure it's sharp, and it will do an impressive job. Otherwise, hand-pull individual ones. Work in the morning hours, if you can, so you don't get overheated (evening may be full of swarming mosquitoes).

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 127

Visit the garden center for midsummer bargains. The crowds are gone, and the offerings may be depleted, but sometimes you can score good deals on larger plants. Just remember that anything you plant now will need extra water and attention to survive the stress of being moved in the heat.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 128

Lift up and look under your potted plants. If the contents have been thriving, roots may have filled the entire container and be clogging the drainage holes. If water cannot drain properly, performance declines and rot can follow. Two solutions: repot the contents in something larger, or remove a plant or two.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 129

Sketch or photograph your flowerbeds when they are at their peak. Not only will the images be a source of pride, but they'll also provide useful information when you view them with care later. You'll be able to identify successful combinations, as well as ones that didn't work out—all fodder for deciding on next year's plans.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 130

Japanese beetles? These half-inch, metallic, green-and-copper pests make some gardeners homicidal. Just a few can decimate a rose planting; plus they attack other garden flowers. Spread a cloth under the affected plants, shake the plants to dislodge the beetles, then scoop them up and drown them in a bucket of soapy water.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 131

Berry plants will soon start to ripen their sweet harvest. But there's competition for the fruit—birds, wild animals, and various insect pests. Luckily, they can all be thwarted the same way—if you act early. Drape the plants in netting; garden-supply shops and mail-order suppliers sell large-enough pieces with the right mesh.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 132

Visit the shrubs, rosebushes, and trees that you planted this spring and give each one a tune-up. (You should already be supplying good soaking waterings.) Check for signs of disease and insect pests. Cut off all afflicted plant parts and get rid of them. (But save a small amount if you need a diagnosis and advice on treatment.)

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 133

Time to give rampant-growing shrubs and hedges another haircut! Use freshly sharpened clippers and loppers. If the plants are thorny or twiggy, wear a long-sleeved shirt and tough gloves as you work. Remove suckers emerging from the bases. Clip back new growth all around to inspire a thicker profile.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 134

Some plants develop powdery mildew in midsummer, thanks to the heat and humidity. In particular, the leaves of lilacs, roses, phlox, and green beans turn powdery white. There's not much you can do, save trying to improve air circulation within and around the plants with a little judicious clipping. In the future, plant resistant varieties.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 135

If your area experiences a prolonged hot or dry spell, refrain from fertilizing. Fertilizer is most effective when plants are well hydrated and their soil is damp; otherwise, the food never reaches the roots or can "burn" them. Also, freshly fed plants tend to put on a flush of new growth, which would be instantly stressed by the blazing weather.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 136

Keep pots of herbs near the kitchen for spontaneous summer meals. Ones that do well in a container include rosemary, cilantro, sage, parsley, oregano, chives, and thyme. Water in the morning and cut just before using for best flavor. Rinse off dust or dirt before using. Cut herbs often to prevent flowering, which changes foliage flavor.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 137

Float rose petals in a punch or sangria, or scatter them over butter-cream-frosted cake or cupcakes. Pick them on a hot afternoon when the fragrance is at its peak; rinse them gently (critically important if you have sprayed your rosebushes; unsprayed flowers are safest), pat dry, then store in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for a few hours before using.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 138

Here's a clever way to water hanging baskets or other potted plants, especially when you won't be around to attend to them on a hot day. Set a few ice cubes on their surface before you leave the house. These will melt slowly over the course of a few hours, gradually soaking in.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 139

Lower leaves of your tomato plants turning yellow? This is caused by plant diseases that develop in hot weather when air circulation is poor. If the plant is not too bushy yet, installing a tomato cage may help improve air circulation. Also be sure to water right at ground level; never let water splash up onto the leaves.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 140

Check on your compost pile. Hot weather causes the contents to break down faster, and you may find you have a bounty of "black gold." If you don't use it, it will continue to break down. Instead, scoop it out and use it around the yard as a nourishing mulch on heat-stressed plants.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 141

If you are growing leafy herbs for harvest, prevent them from going to seed by pinching off flowers when they develop. This forces the plants to continue producing tasty leaves and prevents self-sowing. Last but not least, it thwarts bees, which are more interested in the flowers than any other part of the plant, of course.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 142

As soon as flowers or stems start to turn brown, cut them back to live growth. This not only improves their appearance, but helps prevent insect pests and diseases from moving in. And it will encourage some plants to rebloom later in the season. Cut-and-come-again favorites include yarrow, daisies, and delphiniums.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 143

Look before you squish a garden bug! Not all are harmful pests. When in doubt as to a critter's identity, look him up in gardening books or take one (in a jar) to a garden center staffer. If it is a pest, you can get advice on how to combat it and buy any product you might need while there.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 144

Weed-whacking is not a fun chore, but these tips will make the project faster and more efficient. If possible, work in the late afternoon, past the heat of the day, when the plants are drier. Make sure the tool is clean and you have fresh "string" reeled out several inches. Wear socks, long pants, and eye protection.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 145

Some plants might be tuckered out by now. Yank out scraggly annuals, and cut back flagging perennials. Assuming the plants are not diseased or harboring pests, you can throw all these prunings onto the compost pile—this way, they'll contribute to the garden again, later, when they've broken down.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 146

If a weed problem has gotten out of hand and you are ready to resort to herbicides (weed killer), do so with care. Cut back the offending patch as much as possible. Then spray on a dry, windless day. As a precaution, temporarily protect nearby desirable plants with plastic or a tarp.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 147

Set out a hummingbird feeder! Red-dyed sugar water is now considered unneeded and possibly not good for the little birds. Better to fill a red feeder with colorless sugar water (one part sugar to four parts water; mix, boil, and cool before filling). Flowers they like, such as honeysuckle and trumpet creeper, will also keep hummers around.

❑ *Check when completed*

JULY

Tip 148

Combat tunneling rodents that are dining on your garden from below. They may be mice or voles, using the passageways made by moles. (Moles are actually carnivorous and even eat grubs.) A cat that's a good hunter is perhaps your best weapon; traps can work; poisons should be your last resort. Also, reduce mulch around plant stems, which rodents nest in.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 149

Get more shrubs from midsummer's "semi-hardwood" cuttings. These root easily and grow into young plants by fall. Dust the base of pencil-thin shoots with rooting powder, then plant in light, organically rich ground. Water gently and often—they should root in four to six weeks. Good candidates: mock orange, buddleia, viburnum, kerria.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 150

Make delicious berry vinegar. Start with 3 cups of washed, dried berries (raspberries, blackberries, even strawberries). Place in a large ceramic or glass bowl. Heat 4 cups of plain white vinegar, stir in 1/2 cup sugar until dissolved. Pour over berries, cover, and let sit for two days before straining into decorative glass bottles.

❑ *Check when completed*

AUGUST

Tip 151

The weed wars are far from over. Under no circumstances should you let annual weeds go to seed! This is how they create a population explosion. As for perennial weeds, late summer is when foliage sends energy down into the root system. Thwart all of them by chopping off their heads, yanking them out, or both.

❑ *Check when completed*

AUGUST

Tip 152

Gardeners are at risk during summer storms that involve lightning. Water is a great conductor of electricity, so get away from the pool, fountain, sprinklers, and hose. Don't stand under an oak or other tall tree, under an arbor, or in a gazebo. Get in the car, or get in the house.

❑ *Check when completed*

AUGUST

Tip 153

Walk through and double-check all your plant supports, from tomato cages to staked hollyhocks. Rampant growth and full weight may have caused them to lean or pulled them down. Reinsert stakes securely into the ground, replace missing ties, and add more ties as needed. In other words, reestablish order.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 154

Flowerbeds looking heat-stressed? Take a two-pronged approach to rejuvenation. First, go out in the morning while it's cool and tidy up, clipping off spent blooms and removing bedraggled and excessive growth. Second, add or renew a mulch layer at their feet; this helps retain some soil moisture and makes the area look neater.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 155

Cut roses for bouquets. Midmorning is ideal because dew has dried but midday heat is not yet depriving the blooms of moisture. Choose buds that are showing color and just beginning to unfurl—these will finish opening indoors, providing you with quite a show. Cut on an angle, underwater if possible, for maximum water uptake.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 156

How do you know when to harvest a melon? When it's big? When its skin is colorful? When you thump it and hear a deep thud? If these methods sound too vague, don't worry. Harvest when the stem slips readily from the fruit. Pick it up—if the vine falls away, you are free to walk away with the melon.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 157

White grubs in your lawn? Now is the prime time to go after them. There are a variety of biologic and insecticidal treatments that will control or eradicate these annoying pests. Start by digging up and taking a few examples down to your local garden center so that you get the right product for the right critter. Fall lawn aeration will kill some grubs.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 158

Pick and dry fragrant herbs—it's one of gardening's most enchanting chores. Pick lush stems whose blossoms have formed but not yet opened, for maximum scent and flavor. Rinse them quickly and completely pat dry. Make bundles and hang them upside-down in a hot, dark spot, such as an attic. This way, they'll dry before they can rot.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 159

The flowers of your summer bulbs may be past their prime, but be patient with the leaves. Let them die down naturally. They are busy sending valuable starches and sugars into the root system, to fuel next year's display. Don't cut off the leaves until they are completely yellow and limp.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 160

Mail-order bulb catalogs are on hand now, or you can shop via the Internet. These outlets will afford you a far broader selection of interesting and colorful spring-flowering bulbs than you'd ever see at a garden center, so feast your imagination on the enticing offerings. Order now so you'll get them in time for fall planting.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 161

Try some new bulbs this year. If you like tulips, seek out more offbeat kinds, like fluted "parrot" ones or ones with fringed petals. If you like daffodils, look for the pink-cupped ones or smaller flowered but highly fragrant white ones. Other offbeat bulbs: fritillaries, spring snowflake, camassia.

❑ *Check when completed*

AUGUST

Tip 162

Pick tomatoes! In many varieties, the crop can get so heavy that it pulls down the plant, so you are doing it a favor by removing weight! If you have surplus, give it away, make sauce, or learn how to can. Whatever you do, never refrigerate garden tomatoes—the flesh loses its softness and sweetness.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 163

A whitefly problem can develop if you have potted plants in a warm corner of the porch or deck. One wave of your hand will send up a cloud of these foliage-sucking beasties. Fight back with sprays from the hose. Segregate affected plants, so you can treat them individually and also to improve air circulation.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 164

Support big, floppy perennials now blooming or about to bloom, including boltonia, aster, artemisia, and Japanese anemones. One effective method is to rig stakes around the base and run string between them—a little makeshift containment fence. Or run string around a big plant and cinch the ends to a nearby fence or post.

❑ *Check when completed*

AUGUST

Tip 165

Extra water is critical in the dog days of August when there is often less rain. Water deeply and regularly at the bases of the plants, where possible. While it can be wasteful, overhead sprinkler watering does help reduce heat stress by lowering leaf temperatures. In any event, water in the morning or evening to avoid moisture evaporation.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 166

Time to pick your glads! Make your move when the first few buds at the bottom of the spike are completely open but the rest are still in bud. (Leave foliage on the plant; it replenishes the corm for next year's show.) Recut the stems indoors, and put in a vase of lukewarm water; change the water daily.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 167

Favorite annuals (cleome, cosmos) going to seed? If you like them, let them, and you'll have a crowd next year. But a couple should be reined in, before it's too late, by clipping off their fading flowers or developing seedheads: four 'clocks (self-sown ones never seem to have the same pretty colors) and foxgloves (poisonous to animals).

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 168

Do not fertilize your rosebushes any more, or they'll have reduced winter hardiness. Also, late doses inspire a burst of soft green growth that will be vulnerable to frost. Enjoy the remaining buds and blossoms—in the garden or in bouquets. The bushes will continue to be productive for a while yet.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 169

Fruit trees ought to be bearing about this time. Wait till the color is good before picking. If you miss the boat and ripe fruit falls on the ground, snag it right away. It may be just fine. If you leave it there, it's only going to rot, attracting bees and disease.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 170

Dried flowers for arrangements and craft projects are easy to make. Just remember that whatever form or stage the blooms are in, that's how they'll dry, with no changes. Array them on screens in a hot, dry, well-ventilated room. Or place them in plastic boxes of silica gel for a few days.

❑ *Check when completed*

AUGUST

Tip 171

Install a new brick or flagstone path—a much easier job in dry weather. Carve out the course with a shovel to a depth of several inches, then fill with a base of sand or sand dust. Wiggle the bricks or stones into place, separating them by an inch or less. Water down, let settle, add more sand if needed.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 172

Cut fragrant flowers early in the day while they are full of moisture. Scent resides within the cells of the petals, so the higher the water content, the higher the amount of scent ingredient. Prolong the delight by displaying them in a vase that is set in indirect or low light.

❑ *Check when completed*

AUGUST

Tip 173

Harvest your cucumbers, squash, and zucchini on an almost daily basis. This practice encourages more production; plus you don't want them to rot on the vine. Donate your surplus to a local food bank (they usually get canned goods—homegrown produce will be a treat).

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 174

Now is a fine time to attend to your bearded iris plants. Pry up the clump with a garden fork. Cut the foliage low; then split it into clumps, each with some fat rhizomes and a little fan of leaves. Replant and water—there's time for the divisions to get established before cold weather arrives.

❑ *Check when completed*

AUGUST

Tip 175

Watch your potato plants, and once you see the foliage dying down, dig down and pull up your harvest. Wipe the spuds with a damp cloth, let them dry, and store them in the refrigerator until you are ready to cook. Leave the ones you don't need yet in the ground, though; they'll keep better there, for now.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 176

Shop the sales at the garden center! Perennials, ornamental grasses, even rosebushes may be offered at bargain prices. If it's still too hot to plant, hold these in their pots in a sheltered location for a couple of weeks. Just remember to stop by often, even daily, to see whether they need a drink of water.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 177

Some annuals, having exhausted themselves and unable to continue in the summer heat, will quit blooming around now. They are not going to magically revive later. The show is over; yank them out. Toss them on the compost pile. Meanwhile, back in the garden, either replace them with fresh reinforcements or mulch over the gap.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 178

Cut your dahlias as often as you can. The more you harvest, the more the plants will produce—you can't say that about every flower, but dahlias never disappoint. Just be sure you have a tall and sturdy vase (something tilt-proof!) to hold them, because some varieties are quite big and top-heavy.

❑ *Check when completed*

AUGUST

Tip 179

Cease and desist fertilizing your flowerbeds. Most plants are past their prime anyway, flowering finished or almost finished, so there is no benefit. The food would only get the plants to generate fresh new growth—which you don't want to sprout just as cooler weather is starting to arrive.

❑ *Check when completed*

AUGUST

Tip 180

Keep an eye on your lawn and be ready to mow again as needed. Lawn grass slows growth in hot spells and resumes when the weather cools down. Meanwhile, don't deprive it of water—but don't overdo either. Deliver about an inch of water every few days, or whenever the grass looks wilted.

❑ *Check when completed*

Fall

Everyday Tip

Visit a public garden, or go on a garden tour. Bring your camera and, just as important, a notebook. With or without the help of a guide, you will find plenty to learn and lots of inspiration. Be sure to write down the names of plants or plant combinations you admire (if there are no labels, ask someone).

SEPTEMBER

Tip 181

Find out your area's predicted first fall frost date. Check your local paper, or call a garden center or nearby Cooperative Extension office. Though it's usually not till later this month or October, depending on where you live, you need to know now so you can calculate how much gardening time you have left.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 182

Time to tuck in some color in the garden gaps! Nurseries and garden centers will have plenty of sedums and ornamental kales and cabbages for sale. These are favorites, with good reason. They're durable and long-lasting, and as temperatures drop, their color often gets richer. Mums are also offered in a rainbow of hues—mix and match!

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 183

Plant garlic four to six weeks before the ground freezes. Fertile soil is important, but even more important is well drained soil, lest your bulbs rot in soggy ground. (Growing garlic in a raised bed works great.) Plant individual cloves an inch deep, pointed end up, and mulch well. Most aboveground growth won't occur till spring.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 184

Hot days and cool nights can cause tomatoes to develop unsightly splits in the sides of the fruit. If you are worried this is going to happen, try to moderate the effects by keeping the plants evenly moist. Also, don't leave fruits on the vine too long—harvest them as soon as you see early signs of marring.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 185

Are your daylilies overcrowded and blooming sparsely? Divide them now to jumpstart your spring display. Prepare the new bed or area first, though, so the roots won't dry out. Dig up the clumps, and divide into sections (back-to-back gardening forks might be needed). Replant pieces that include a good chunk of roots and topgrowth.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 186

Autumn is a fine time to lay turfgrass sod, especially suitable for slopes. Remove rocks, weeds, and roots. Till lightly to loosen the soil, sprinkle a little slow-acting lawn fertilizer (follow directions on the bag), and rake smooth. Put the sod down on a cool, cloudy day, and water well. Keeping seams and edges moist is critical!

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 187

Now is also a good time to sow cool-season lawn grass seed mix. Clear out the planting area, add weed-free organic matter, and rake smooth. If you don't use a mechanical seeder, just broadcast left to right, and then up and down, to make sure the whole area is covered. Keep constantly moist so the seeds can germinate and seedlings develop a strong root system.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 188

Do you feel like your autumn landscape lacks color and punch? Visit some public or private gardens find out what is looking fabulous right now in your area. Perhaps you can plant something this year; if not, make a wish list and act on it next spring. Check out the many types of asters now available!

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 189

Plant a shrub or tree. The soil is still warm, and drenching fall rains will help water it in. Dig an ample hole. Mix native soil with some organic matter for backfilling only if the soil is heavily clay. Set the plant at or above the level it was growing in the pot, and press the dirt firmly around it. Water weekly until the ground freezes.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 190

Harvest and cure onions. While they're still in the ground, knock over their tops with a rake. Make your move a week later—get them out of the ground, wipe them free of dirt, and arrange on screens to dry. Only then can you clip off their tops. Store in a cool, dry place.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 191

Deciduous trees that bleed sap after spring pruning—notably birches and maples—can be trimmed now with little risk. Use the same system; that is, take out all "non-negotiable" growth first, such as dead and damaged wood. Then thin, including taking out crossing branches. Finally, shorten good limbs by a few inches all around as you shape.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 192

Make a colorful fall arrangement. Start with a few branches of vivid fall foliage. Fill in with softer textured but bright fall perennials such as goldenrod and purple asters. Add a few branches that are adorned with red berries or red rose hips (strip foliage from these). Use the seedheads of ornamental grasses as dramatic filler.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 193

Feed your trees and shrubs one last time. At this point in the year, shoot growth has ceased and the still actively growing roots of woody plants will make most efficient use of the fertilizer's nutrients. Research has shown that early spring growth depends heavily on this stored bounty.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 194

Fertilize the lawn. It's much smarter to do this now, rather than in the spring (when the food would also inspire a fresh growth spurt from weeds!). Topgrowth is slowing down or finished, so the nutrients will fortify the roots. Remember to water before and after for the best uptake.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 195

Dig up gladiolus corms and dahlia tubers. Get them out of the ground before it freezes, dry them on screens for a day or two, and then clean them off. Store them in bags in a frost-free spot. Don't forget to label! And sprinkle a little fungicide dust into each bag to prevent rot.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 196

Bring some tender herbs in for the winter. Cut them back to live growth first. Then dig them up and put them in pots, watering well. Leave the pots in a sheltered area for a while, checking on them from time to time, just to get them used to container life. Move them indoors when frost threatens.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 197

Plant some peonies! These beautiful, tough perennials relish an organically rich soil. The only tricky part is placing them at the proper planting depth—the little pink "eyes" (buds) on their clumping roots should end up no more than 2 inches below the soil surface.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 198

Buy some bales of straw or hay to stockpile for winter mulching. Straw has fewer weed seeds than regular hay. Best of all is salt-marsh hay, if you can get it. It's mainly dried sea grasses, and if there are seeds present, they won't germinate in your garden because they need salty conditions.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 199

Start raking fall leaves. If you wait till they all drop, the job can be too big! Scoot piles off to one side or stuff them in paper bags as you work. You can compost them or use them as a mulch (chopped up, preferably—run over them with the lawn mower).

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 200

Have you admired those random but bright and colorful drifts of spring bulbs, but wondered how to get that spontaneous "naturalized" look? It's easy. Just toss handfuls into the chosen area and plant each one where it lands. Dig a hole twice as deep as the bulb's size, sprinkle in some compost, set in the bulb, cover, and water.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 201

Continue to mow the lawn over 2 inches tall as long as it is growing to keep it looking neat. This sends it into winter looking as good as can be expected and means it will be in better shape next spring when growth ramps up again. Mow the final leaf drop and leave it to topdress the turf.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 202

Buying bulbs locally? Examine each one. It should be clean, with no blemishes. Squeeze it to be sure it is firm and plump. Compare it to its fellows and choose the heftier ones (light ones are dried up inside). Note that comparatively bigger ones have more stored reserves and thus are more likely to put on a big show.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 203

Lay out and prepare a new bed. You may have more time, energy, and enthusiasm for this project now than in the spring. Mark the boundaries, dig out obstructions, and mix in plenty of organic matter to a depth of several inches. Then cover with black plastic or mulch and let it all meld over the winter months.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 204

Clean up your roses! Don't prune—but it's okay to remove spent flowers and dead or damaged stems and leaves. Be sure to clean up under the plants, too, as pests and diseases can lay dormant in debris that is left behind. Last but not least, water well.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 205

Devote a few hours to planting tulips. Select a sunny spot with well-drained soil—soggy ground is fatal. Plant them a safe distance down, 6 to 8 inches or so, to avoid any chance of frost-heaving. Give them good sandy loam, a dash of compost, and a good watering when you're done. (Deer love tulips; protect them next spring.)

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 206

Fertilize existing and new bulb plantings with care. Use slow-acting plant food in the bed so it does not burn tender roots at a time when they don't need any stress. Alternately, "top-dress" bulbs by sprinkling granular fertilizer on the surface and watering it in. Holland Bulb Booster™ (9-9-6) is great for tulips and members of the lily family.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 207

Wrap large tub-grown shrubs or trees for the winter. The easiest, most effective way to do this is to create a column of chicken wire all around the pot and twice as tall, at least. Dump in fall leaves. Add a cover, or encase the entire thing in hardware cloth or burlap.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 208

Time to start bringing tender and tropical potted plants inside. Give them one last good watering outside, and check thoroughly for insect pests. Cut off all remaining flower stalks and scraggly foliage. Find them a cool, nonfreezing spot, such as an enclosed porch or sunroom.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 209

Foil rodents that like to eat your tulip bulbs. "Cage" the bulbs, making a box out of chicken wire that you fill with soil and bulbs. The roots will be able grow through the bottom, and in spring, the foliage and stalks will make it to the light.

❑ *Check when completed*

SEPTEMBER

Tip 210

Watch for bugs that try to enter your home or garage looking for shelter and warmth. Common culprits include ladybugs, or box elder beetles. They won't harm wood, pets, or you, but they are a nuisance. Your best bet is to thwart them with caulking and weather-stripping.

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 211

Cut back your taller perennials before frost comes—even if there's some lingering live growth, flowers, or seedheads. Chopping down to within a few inches above the soil level seems brutal, but it will do no harm and the way will be cleared for next spring's resurgence.

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 212

Spare a few perennials whose dried flowers have winter value. Birds may enjoy the dried flowerheads, either as a place to alight or as a seed source. And whenever snow finally arrives, some of these plants look beautiful with a jaunty white cap. Examples include ornamental grasses, echinacea, rudbeckia, sedum, and astilbe.

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 213

Time to close down the vegetable garden. Pull out and compost all plant debris, with the exception of anything that was diseased (bag up that stuff and send it away with the household trash). Mulch with chopped-up fall leaves or compost (or both), which you can dig in next spring.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 214

Get ready for an indoor holiday forced bulb display now—most take six to ten weeks to bloom. Pot up tulips, hyacinths, grape hyacinths, and daffodils. Use a light, sterile potting mix and plant more shallowly than you would outside, around 1 or 2 inches deep. Label, water, and set them in a dark, cool place for the necessary chilling period.

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 215

Send your broadleaf evergreens into winter in good shape. Water each one deeply one last time before the ground freezes. Once it does, spray the entire foliage with an "antidesiccant" (available at a garden center—follow the directions on the label). This keeps the leaves from curling and drying (winter, actually, is a time of drought).

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 216

Shield your evergreens, if they are marginally hardy or growing in an exposed or windy location. Some people make plywood tents, which is fine, if the wood is not flimsy and you can make them secure. Otherwise, a cage of burlap supported by wooden stakes also does the trick. Do not cover with plastic.

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 217

Protect your ripening pumpkins. About now, the skin should be hard and the color should be darkening, but if they are exposed to a frost, they will turn black—what a disappointment. Just cover the plant with a tarp for the night if the forecast is for subfreezing temperatures.

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 218

Plant a balled-and-burlapped evergreen. Set it into a hole that is about the same depth as the rootball but three times wider—the roots like to spread outward. Mix good organic matter (compost or dampened peat moss) with the native soil (if the soil is poor) when backfilling. Handle the plant by the rootball as you work. Water well.

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 219

Pick the last tomatoes, especially if frost threatens. Help partially ripe ones continue to turn red by placing them in a bowl with an apple. The ethylene gas that a ripe apple naturally emits hastens this process (no, it's not that the apple is "showing them how it's done"!).

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 220

Harvest sunflower seeds—assuming the birds haven't beaten you to it. Cut the flowerhead off with about a foot of stem attached and hang it in a dry, airy location to finish ripening. Whatever you do, don't stack or bag the heads, or they will rot. Ripe seeds can be flicked off and dried further.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 221

When the mums start to fade, don't treat them like expensive annuals. They are easy to winter over. Just dig them up, rootball and all, and transfer them to a cold frame. Cover with mulch. Alternatively, leave them where they are growing but mulch heavily. Being subjected to freeze-thaw cycles is what kills them.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 222

Rescue your tuberous begonias. Frost will kill them, so act today. Dig them up or knock them out of their pots. Clip off topgrowth; yanking it exposes the tubers to rot. Shake off the soil, let them dry out for a week or so, then store in a bag of dry vermiculite in a cool spot (the fridge will do, if you have room).

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 223

Parsley can be saved. You may already have noticed it is a cold-tolerant herb. Pick the last green stems, rinse off the dirt, and dry with paper towels. Place them into a plastic baggie, squeeze the air out, and seal. The contents will keep in the freezer for months.

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 224

Buy birdseed. The widely available mixes are not always the best bet, though. These tend to attract undesirable birds and pesky rodents (such as squirrels, raccoons, and rats). Instead, look for 100 percent sunflower seed, nyjer seed (thistle), or safflower seed—nutritious treats favored by smaller migrating songbirds.

❑ *Check when completed*

15

OCTOBER

Tip 225

Renew the organic matter
in the tidied-up vegetable garden
and now-emptied flowerbeds.
Do this before the ground freezes.
Well-rotted compost is ideal, or
you can buy bagged compost.
Dehydrated cow manure and
chopped-up fall leaves are also good.
Dig and mix everything to a depth
of 6 or more inches.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 226

Sow a cover crop in any open spot in need of organic matter. These annuals germinate in cooler, moist soil and may even grow some on milder days. You'll till them under next spring. They will stop erosion and prevent nutrients from leaching away over the winter months. (What kind? Get advice from your local garden center or Extension agent.)

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 227

Bring along a shovel and "edit" your garden—this is an ideal time to remove plants that didn't work out. Perhaps they took up too much space or didn't perform well, or maybe you simply didn't end up liking the way they look. Dig them up and give them away or toss their remains on the compost pile.

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 228

Remove root suckers from your apple and crabapple trees—suckers both divert energy from the tree and detract from its appearance. Gently digging down to the source of the sucker, with your fingers or a trowel, will provide more complete removal than just lopping it off.

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 229

Protect marginally hardy rose-bushes. Grafted ones, in particular, have a hard time in cold winters, often dying down to the rootstock (thus the roses you wanted are killed off). Shovel lots of mulch over the base of the plant, up and over the bulging graft. Or place a cage over the entire plant and fill with mulch.

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 230

Protect a marginally hardy climbing rose for the winter. Wear tough gloves and protective clothing if it's a thorny one. Get up on a ladder and carefully remove the canes from the support or trellis. Lower them onto the ground, peg them in place, and cover with plenty of mulch.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 231

Shorter days with less light inspire spider plants to form "spiders" at last. Let these grow to several inches big, then sever them from the mother plant and pot up. Nurture them in a warm, bright room for now; don't neglect watering. Later, you can move them into their own hanging basket or give them away.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 232

Protect garden concrete and terra-cotta—such as pots, urns, statuary, and birdbaths—from winter damage. Because it absorbs water that can freeze, concrete cracks all too easily. Bring indoors or waterproof them with a silicon-based water seal, a paint meant for outdoor use, or even a thin layer of white cement. At least, cover or turn over vulnerable pieces.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 233

Save the seeds that you scoop out of your Halloween jack-o-lantern. Spread them out and dry them on a tray or paper plate, then put them out for the birds. A platform bird feeder displays and holds them well. Cardinals in particular relish this treat.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 234

If you haven't already done so, cover the grill and your lawn furniture for the winter. Or bring them into a protected area inside, such as the garage or basement. If you leave these things exposed to the elements for many months, no matter how durable they are, there's likely to be damage or fading.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 235

Clean your outdoor cushions. Use a stiff brush to get off dirt; then whack out the dust. Put them to dry in a warm area for several days, such as the laundry room (better still, if they will fit, run them through the dryer). There must be absolutely no lingering moisture, or they will mildew or become smelly in storage.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 236

Drain the hose and bring it in for the winter. Wipe down its surface with a cloth so there's no moisture or mud. Don't hang it. Store it flat, someplace dry and dark. Let it coil the way it does naturally; forcing it in other ways, especially when it is cold, leads to cracks.

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 237

Close up the compost pile for the winter. Its activity has been slowing for a while now, and tossing kitchen scraps on it at this point leads only to a pile of chilly or frozen garbage that doesn't break down. Give it one last stir, if possible; then replace the lid or cover it with a tarp to discourage rodents.

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 238

Prevent small, fragile conifers from winter damage. Winter ice and snow can snap or bend their branches, harming their health and marring their compact look. Just take a long strip of fabric, about 2 inches wide, and wind it around the plant from the bottom to the top, securing the branches.

❑ *Check when completed*

OCTOBER

Tip 239

Prevent the possibility of snow mold forming on your lawn over the winter months. Thoroughly rake any fall leaves that have not been chopped by the mower to be topdressing. Then, if feasible, mow the lawn one last time at about 2 inches high, because this fungal disease breeds in taller lawn grass.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 240

Check on your pots of forced bulbs. They should be in a cool but not freezing area. If they're in the path of foot traffic (the basement stairs, for instance), try to find a safer spot. Keep their soil moistened but by no means soggy, and watch for signs of sprouts.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 241

You may still be able to harvest some cold-weather crops out of the vegetable garden. Root crops in particular do okay. Indeed, turnips seem to be even sweeter if the weather is cold and the ground chilly. Just push aside protective mulch and haul out what you need.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 242

If you have a black walnut tree, this is the time of year you are glad of it (its inhibiting effect on plants grown near it is well documented). However, those tasty nuts are encased in a stubborn husk. If hitting them with a hammer doesn't work, lay the nuts on the driveway and drive the car over them.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 243

Are some of your fall-planted bulbs peeking up right now? Grape hyacinths and Madonna lilies will do this some years, especially if winter is arriving slowly. Don't be alarmed; they aren't actually poised to flower too soon. Throw a little extra mulch over them if you want.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 244

Empty all the windowboxes, now, when you finally have time. Discard the soil mix, as well as the dead plants. Scrub them out a bit with a brush, and wipe them down inside and out. It doesn't take long, and you'll be glad you did this when spring returns and you get in the mood to refill them.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 245

Move emptied pots and containers of all kinds out of the weather. Rinse them out if they're dirty, and stack them in the garage, shed, or basement. Instead of getting rid of cracked clay pots, break them into small pieces and save these; they may come in handy for a drainage layer another day.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 246

Take the day to sit down and update your garden log or journal. Do this now before you get too busy with holiday preparations—and while the garden you recently enjoyed is still fresh in your memory. Make notes and resolutions for next year's garden.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 247

Buy amaryllis bulbs right now, if you want them to be part of your late-winter or holiday season décor. They typically take six to eight weeks to bloom. Get prepotted "kits," or buy loose bulbs and pot them yourself. Just remember that the hefty bulb should be set half-in, half-out of the mix.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 248

Harvest those vegetables that tolerate a frost: broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, cabbage, and the like. Clean them well before eating them raw or cooking them. They might inspire you to make a hot homemade soup. Extras will keep well in a cool, dark place or the fridge.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 249

Deal with overhanging or otherwise risky tree branches now, before winter comes and a burden of snow or ice causes them to fall. Call a tree service, get a written estimate, ask if they are insured, and supervise the removal. If you want the wood for firewood or another use, speak up.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 250

Planning to buy a living Christmas tree this year, and plant it in the yard after the holidays? Don't buy it yet—but it would be smart to decide where its permanent outdoor home will be . . . and to dig the hole now, before the ground is frozen solid. That way, you'll be ready to go.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 251

Rake up the last of the fall leaves. Don't put them directly on flowerbeds or the vegetable garden (even though it's tempting). They'll only mat down. Run them through a shredder, or pass over them with the lawnmower; then consolidate them in their own pile (not the compost pile). You'll be able to use them next year.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 252

Mist your indoor plants. When the heat comes on in the house this time of year, the air quickly gets dry. Your houseplants may suffer from this sudden lack of humidity, and spritzing them with water will help them. (If you don't have a good mister, why not go out and buy one?)

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 253

Stratify seeds that need it—some perennials, some wildflowers. They actually won't germinate unless they get a month or two of winter cold and moisture. Supply this by sowing them into a garden bed now or into flats that you keep outside. Which seeds require stratification? The seed packet will tell you, and tell you for how long.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 254

Protect the young trees in your yard from small rodents, rabbits, and deer that nibble during the winter. If they "girdle" the tree (strip away or destroy bark either part or all the way around), it can die. Thwart these pests by putting a cylinder of hardware cloth around each tree and pressing it into the ground a few inches.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 255

Protect the young trees in your yard from winter "sunscald," literally a sunburn that occurs on the sunny side of the tree during the winter when it is more exposed. Paint the lowest foot or so of the trunk with white latex paint, or install a temporary bandage of burlap.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 256

Make some durable plant labels, while you have time and are thinking of it. Then just stash them away until next spring. You won't get everything taken care of, of course, but you can certainly do ones for major, favorite plants. Write on metal markers with a grease pencil or on smooth rocks with a permanent marker.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 257

Browse the gardening section in your favorite bookstore. New gardening books are often issued this time of year, just before the holiday season. If you don't buy a title for yourself, at least you can make a "wish list" and place hints for friends and relatives.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 258

Move your African violet plants! Winter's shorter days deprive them of the 12 to 16 hours of sun that they prefer each day. You can put them on a windowsill that faces either south or east, or be sure to place them under fluorescent lights.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 259

Evaluate your entire houseplant collection. Pinch off and discard scraggly growth and spent flower stalks. Check for lingering insect pests. In most cases, it is a good practice to stop fertilizing and to reduce water for foliage plants for the winter months so they can have a rest. Flowering plants need some fertilizer and regular watering.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 260

Attend a winter gardening class or an interesting lecture. Flyers for these will be at garden centers, listed in local newspapers, or described in the newsletters of nearby botanic gardens or arboreta. It's good to get out of the house—and always worthwhile to get educated and inspired in the off-season.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 261

Evaluate your vegetable garden and make notes for next year. Tuck these notes where you can refer to them early next spring. Do you need more space for ramblers like squash, zucchini, and pumpkin? Did you have too many tomato plants and not enough peppers? Should the entire garden be bigger or smaller?

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 262

Shop for the gardeners on your gift list by mail-order catalog (or go to a company's website). Order now so everything arrives in time and you avoid last-minute rush-shipping fees. If you can't decide—or you want to give a plant of their own choosing—get a gift certificate or a membership to a local arboretum.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 263

Stop in at the local garden center now and buy lots of paper-white narcissus bulbs for forcing—they may be cheaper when purchased in large quantities. Keep some for yourself, and save the spares for gift-giving. (You can also give the recipient a suitable pot and some pebbles; if this is your plan, get all the supplies now.)

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 264

Did you know there's an annual that is not an annual, one you can easily overwinter? It's your potted geranium (really a pelargonium). Cut it back to a few inches high, thus removing most or all of its leaves and stems, and place it in a cool room. Keep its soil mix lightly moist all winter, and it will revive next spring.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 265

Create a Thanksgiving centerpiece for the dinner or buffet table. Cut sprigs from evergreens in the yard and supplement these with some store-bought flowers. Orchids, carnations, and roses are abundant at the florist this time of year and go well. Keep the arrangement fresh by holding it in the fridge or a cold room until you set the table.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 266

Assuming the ground is now frozen, protect precious or marginally hardy woodland ground-covers. Scatter a foot-deep layer of hay over the area, fluffing it up as you work (to maximize air space). This will trap heat radiating up from the ground; eventually snow will pack it down. Both ways, it is a fine insulator.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 267

Dreaming of a conservatory, a potting shed, or other major gardening structure? The off-season is the ideal time to do some research, finding out what is available and what you can afford. Scan gardening magazines for ads or surf the Internet, and send away for promotional material. Note that some models are "you-assemble kits."

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 268

Order gardening catalogs; get "on the list" now, before they mail. If you received one last year, and especially if you ordered from a company last year, chances are you'll get another. For all others, fill out the form provided on the website or send a postcard request. If they charge a small fee, be sure to send a check.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 269

Did a persistent pest or disease problem in the garden trouble you this past year? Try to learn more about it—what causes or attracts it, and which plants are favored or targeted. Review the strategies you've already tried. Draw up a battle plan for next year.

❑ *Check when completed*

NOVEMBER

Tip 270

Mulch the garlic you planted in the fall, if you haven't already done so. Because the bulbs are not planted deeply, they are vulnerable to frost heaving and frigid soil conditions. So a good, thick layer of organic mulch is in order. Chopped fall leaves are just fine.

❑ *Check when completed*

Winter

Everyday Tip

You don't have to be a Latin scholar, but it helps to learn the basics of the scientific plant naming system. The first word (italic and always capitalized) is the genus, and the second word is the species. If there is another word set off by single quotation marks, then that is a specific variety sometimes called a cultivar.

DECEMBER

Tip 271

Clean off caked-on dirt and mud from shovels and other large implements before putting them away for the winter. Fill a bucket with sand and mix in some vegetable oil until it's moistened. Plunge in the blade of each dirty tool. The sand's abrasion will help clean it off and the oil will coat the tool, which prevents rust.

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 272

Check on pots of forced bulbs, which you stored in a dark, cool spot and have been moistening from time to time. If they have finally sprouted and are showing flower stalks or buds, it's time to bring them into a bright, warm room. Here, you can look after them as they grow faster. Soon they'll burst into glorious bloom.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 273

Is there a spot you neglected to mulch? Even if the ground is frozen or snow has fallen, it's not too late. Scoop on the mulch anyway! Its natural warmth will melt any snow and it will settle into place and buffer soil temperature over the plants or area you want to protect.

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 274

Save fireplace ashes, assuming you burn regular hardwood logs, not anything with additives. Just scoop them into a bag or bucket and reserve them in a dry place. These can be used in the spring as a soil amendment. They offer potash and lime for your plants if a soil test indicates this is needed.

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 275

Decorate empty windowboxes and planter boxes. Fill them with evergreen cuttings, holly sprigs, even dried seedheads of ornamental grasses. The colder air this time of year should keep them looking intact for at least a few weeks. To keep this material from falling over or blowing away, anchor it with a hidden brick or two, or some rocks.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 276

The best living evergreen trees for indoor as well as outdoor holiday decorating are Alberta spruces. Buy some wherever holiday supplies or plants are sold. They are popular because they have a dense, compact growth habit and tolerate cold weather. Give them occasional light waterings, though; they are alive, after all!

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 277

Safely adorn outdoor plants with strands of lights. Work on a day when conditions are not wet or icy. Drape the lights first, before connecting them to an outdoor electrical cord. Work from the top of the plant down. If you use a ladder, seat it securely first and have a helper hold it steady.

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 278

Place poinsettia plants wisely, so they will look good as long as possible. A windowsill location that gets six hours of light (but not direct sunlight) per day is ideal. Avoid drafty areas and temperatures under 70 degrees Fahrenheit or so. A spot close to a heat source, however, dries out the plant and causes the flowers (actually, colorful bracts) to fade.

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 279

Does the flower stalk of your amaryllis need staking? Some varieties are short and stout and don't need support, but taller ones benefit. Garden retailers sell special amaryllis stakes that support those fabulous but top-heavy flowers. Plunge it into the soil below a safe distance from the fat bulb.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 280

Make herb-flavored olive oils to give as holiday gifts. Buy small glass containers that seal securely with a cork or stopper. Wedge in some sprigs from your overwintered potted herbs: rosemary, oregano, thyme, or a combination. Drizzle in the oil and seal. Affix some pretty labels, and voilà!

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 281

Decorate an outdoor tree to attract hungry overwintering birds. Drape it with garlands made of popcorn, cranberries, peanuts still in their shells, raisins, and bits of orange peel. Hang carrots, apples, colorful Indian corn, and chunks of suet. As the saying goes, "If you build it, they will come"!

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 282

Make ornaments from pinecones. Bring them indoors a few days ahead of time, and set them in a warm place. This dries them out completely, evicts lingering bugs, and ensures that they are fully open. Roll them in household glue and dust them with colorful sequins or glitter. Fashion loops from ribbons or yarn.

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 283

Bring more pots of sprouting forced bulbs from their cold storage into the house proper. Water them well, and place them in bright but indirect light. To help the flowers last longer, don't display them anywhere close to a heat source, particularly not the mantelpiece.

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 284

Expand your selection of cut winter greens beyond the traditional. If you have access to these (on your property or by permission), consider rhododendron, evergreen magnolia, yellow- and green-variegated acuba, and Japanese umbrella pine branches. Add sprigs of berry-covered deciduous holly for color.

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 285

Make a wreath from evergreen cuttings in your own yard. Visit a hobby store and buy a round wire base, green plastic tape, and green florist's wire. Press dampened moss into the base, and wind the tape around it to hold it in place; make a wire hook at the top. Poke in the cuttings thickly all around.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 286

Make evergreen swags for your holiday décor. Use cuttings from your yard or the woods; strip their bases up a few inches. Twist florist's wire around the ends, and then attach them along the length of wire or rope. Enough greens will hide the wire from view.

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 287

Are you leaving some office plants on their own while you take some time off? Make sure they'll survive your absence. Soak them well one last time. Then group them in a bright spot with indirect light only. Loosely drape a large, clear plastic bag (such as a dry-cleaning bag) over them like a tent.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 288

If you travel anywhere with live plants, protect them. Water them a few hours before you leave. Just before you head out, encase them in newspaper and staple the covering closed (florists use this method, you may have noticed). Warm up the car before putting them in. At your destination, hurry inside and unwrap them at once.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 289

Live-cut Christmas trees fare best if you recut the base before putting it into a clean stand or bucket of water. Do this immediately after purchase. Various preservatives have been suggested, including a penny, a splash of vodka or bleach, and aspirin. You can try these, but most important is to remember to top off often with fresh water.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 290

When wrapping presents, tuck a sprig of lavender, rosemary, or other overwintered herb under the ribbon. Taking the trimmings won't do the plant any harm this time of year. And the recipient will be enchanted with this pretty and fragrant reminder of summer days in your garden.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 291

Make some winter potpourri, to scent the living room or bathroom, to give away as gifts, or to bring to a hostess of a holiday party. Mix spruce or fir sprigs, berries, rose hips, small pine or spruce cones, seedpods, and dried flowers and petals. Add cinnamon sticks for fragrance. Display in small bowls.

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 292

Check potted rosemary plants, a popular gift plant this time of year. Because it is technically an evergreen shrub from the Mediterranean, it becomes unhappy in moisture-retentive or soggy soil. You might have to repot yours into a mix that has lots of sand or perlite, to improve drainage.

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 293

Living and live-cut Christmas trees can lose needles and dry out in the warmth of your home. Even the strings of lights generate a small amount of heat that adds to the stress. So keep the soilball or trunk evenly moist, and turn off the lights overnight or when you are out.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 294

Both living and live-cut evergreen trees dry out easily in warm houses. Buy them early so they don't dry out on the sales lot. Plunge the freshly recut trunk of a live-cut tree in water as soon as possible. Keep them cold, even outdoors, until they are brought inside. Bring them into warmth gradually and consider using an antidessicant spray.

❑ *Check when completed*

25

DECEMBER

Tip 295

Make an unusual, fresh-looking, and colorful holiday-table centerpiece this year. Start with a shallow tray and one or more colorful pillar candles. Add a thin layer of water, then fill with salad greens, cherry tomatoes, and peppers.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 296

Take a walk outside. Stay off the frozen grass, but double-check that all the coverings and mulches you've put down are still in place. Carefully shore up any that have been displaced. If wind is the culprit, try covering loose mulch with netting or wire mesh, anchored with rocks.

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 297

Organize your gardening bookshelf, especially if you receive more titles as gifts during the holidays. Separate factual references from reading-for-pleasure titles. Group the references by subject or by season—whatever makes the most sense to you. Then pick one and put it on your bedside table!

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 298

Retrieve some of your homegrown onions or potatoes from storage, and make a hearty soup. While you are there, take a few extra moments to check that none are rotting or sprouting. If you find damaged or "iffy" produce, discard it immediately so the problem doesn't spread.

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 299

As soon as you are sure the ground is frozen, gather up some evergreen boughs (left over from the holidays?) and put them over your perennial and bulb beds. This holds insulating mulch and snow in place. You don't want to do this too early, though, or damaging mice and other rodents might move in.

❑ *Check when completed*

DECEMBER

Tip 300

Since light is low this time of year, some of your houseplants might be suffering a bit. If they're developing lanky stems or yellow leaves, or if the entire plant is leaning towards the nearest light source, it's time to intervene and help. Move them, even if temporarily, to a brighter spot—a sunnier, south-facing window or under lights.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 301

Hang a wall calendar for the coming year, one with big squares that you can write gardening notes and ideas onto. Tack it up at eye level in a high-traffic spot so you will refer to it often. (Maybe you received one with a gardening theme as a gift—if not, they go on sale about now!)

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 302

After a heavy snowfall, pull on your boots, go out, and patrol the yard to ward off potential damage—such as bent or broken limbs—to your trees, shrubs, and hedges. Use a broom, in a downward-sweeping motion, to clear chunks of snow from evergreen branches. Wiggle or shake bent, snow-burdened limbs.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 303

Inventory your seed stash. Some leftovers from last year may still be good, assuming you stored the packets in a dry, cool place. Larger seeds (beans, squash, nasturtium, and morning glory) are more likely to be viable than small seeds (carrots, lettuce, columbines, and poppies). Tiny seeds are less able to retain moisture.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 304

Know before you sow! Slightly dampen paper towels and lay them on a cookie sheet; arrange some old or questionable seeds (about an inch apart). Cover with a damp paper towel, encase the project in a plastic bag, and set in a warm place (at least 65 degrees Fahrenheit). Check back in a few days; ideally at least half should have sprouted.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 305

Inventory and clean your pot collection. New ones are not cheap, and it's easy to get the old ones back into shape. First, scrape out any residue. Soak very dirty pots in a tub or scrub them with a sponge. Finally, sterilize everything in a diluted bleach solution (1 part bleach to 10 parts water) and air-dry.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 306

Tune up your hand tools. With a damp rag, wipe metal surfaces clean of last year's encrusted dirt, caked-on sap, or other crud (or soak or chip it away). Use coarse sandpaper or steel wool to sand off rust spots. Finally, wipe all blades clean with a rag soaked in linseed oil (or substitute vegetable oil from your kitchen).

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 307

Review new plant information in the gardening magazines. These annual roundups usually appear in the January or February issue of all major publications and are great fun to read and dream over. Here you can learn about a brand-new, disease-resistant rose or a good, new short-season hot pepper.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 308

Stop using traditional road salt on your driveway, steps, and walkways. Some may run off into the road, but plenty can seep into your soil. Its presence inhibits roots from absorbing water. Trees and shrubs can develop brown (dead) growth; flowerbeds may be contaminated; and salt often harms a lawn. Instead, use sand.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 309

Check indoor gift plants, like pretty potted azaleas, for insect pests. The dry heat of a home in winter often leads to outbreaks of tiny red spider mites, which form cobwebs and congregate on the bottoms of leaves. Put the pot in the sink and spray thoroughly with stiff jets of water. Repeat, if needed, in a few days.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 310

Time to shop! Gather all your current seed catalogs. Then cruise through them with a pack of yellow sticky notes, flagging pages with items you want. Compare similar varieties and look for new items. Compare prices, check shipping charges, and make a wish list. Then pare down the list to fit your budget.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 311

Check on stored vegetables such as onions, garlic, and winter squash. They should be in a cool—but not freezing—dark place such as the basement or mudroom. Pull out and discard any that have sprouted, have soft spots, or are starting to rot. They won't be good to eat, plus the problem could spread.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 312

Brown or rotted spots on your African violet leaves? Check to be sure that you have not overwatered. There should be no water in their saucers 20 minutes after watering. The best way to water African violets is from the bottom. Just set the pot in a saucer of water and let the plant wick up what it needs, discarding any remaining water.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 313

This may be your Year of the Rose! Check out the All-America Rose Selections winners; results are announced in newspaper gardening columns and winter issues of gardening magazines (or you can visit *www.aars.org*). Thumb through a good book on the topic by an expert, such as *A Year of Roses* by Stephen Scanniello.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 314

Order your seeds—for flowers, as well as vegetables—sooner rather than later. Mail-order seed companies get very busy in the next month or so, and early orders are fulfilled faster. Plus you are more likely to get exactly what you want, with no substitutions or rainchecks.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 315

Plan your flowerbeds on paper. Make yourself do this before you peek at the nursery catalogs, so you don't "put the cart before the horse." Your plan may be an informal picture on regular or graph paper, but try to make it to scale. Gardening books and nursery catalogs will help you estimate mature-plant sizes.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 316

Amaryllis plant all done blooming? Pinch off the fading flowers before the plant expends too much energy trying to go to seed. Move the plant to a sunny window; continue to water it and lightly feed it. The more and healthier leaves it has, the more flower stalks it will be able to generate next winter.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 317

Do your favorite houseplants suddenly have dry edges or brown leaf tips? Low humidity is the culprit, a common problem this time of year. There are several ways to bring them relief: Spritz them occasionally; place them on a tray or dish of pebbles so runoff water can evaporate around them; or place plants closer together.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 318

It's time to stock up on basic seed-starting supplies! You need shallow flats and small pots with drainage holes in the bottoms, labels, several bags of sterile soilless potting mix (available right now at home-supply stores and garden centers), and some plastic wrap for temporary coverings.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 319

Decide where you'd like to keep your developing seedlings, and prepare or clear out the area. Choose a warm area free of drafts. If there is no or poor light, you can provide artificial light. Fluorescent is better than ordinary light bulbs, or you can buy "grow lights." Set lights to be adjustable, so they are kept only inches above seedlings as they grow.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 320

Check the birdfeeders out in the yard. Damp or snowy weather can cause birdseed to clump and rot. You may have to empty out the whole feeder, wipe it clean with paper towels, and refill with fresh seed. The chickadees, especially, will appreciate your efforts.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 321

Join a plant society. For modest dues, this is a great way to get information and meet others who share your enthusiasm for a certain type of plant. Benefits may also include regular meetings, plant swaps, plant shows with awards, and helpful publications. To find one, scan the classified ads of gardening magazines or search the Internet.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 322

Prevent damping-off disease, a fungus that attacks developing seedlings, causing them to shrivel and die right at soil level. The fungi thrive in stagnant air and high humidity. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, so use clean containers and a sterile, soilless seed-starting mix.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 323

Poinsettia still looking good? These popular holiday plants like about six hours of bright light each day. Avoid cold, drafty areas. Too much heat is bad for them, causing the color to fade and the leaves to fall off. Water regularly to keep the soil moist but not soggy, and prevent rot by emptying the saucer of excess water.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 324

This is a fine time to repot your houseplants. They may be pot-bound, or the soil mix may be compacted or worn out. Your plants will repay you with a fresh surge of growth. Remember to accommodate special needs—African violets like a more peaty mix; succulents prefer extra sand or perlite for better drainage.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 325

Make your own potting soil—it's fun and as easy as mixing cake batter! Spread newspapers over the work area. In a large bucket, mix by hand or with a trowel good ingredients such as loam or purified topsoil, peat moss, and sand or perlite. Mix equal parts or tailor your recipe to special plant needs.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 326

Organize your garden magazines (which by now may be in unread piles). Group similar ones, in chronological order, and put them in binders or cases. Note that oftentimes the December or January issue contains an annual index, which you might want to copy and keep separate for quick reference. Take your time—stop to read!

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 327

Does a favorite houseplant look top-heavy and crowded? It could be time to divide it. Ready a few new pots and fresh potting soil. Run a knife around the inside of the pot to help dislodge the plant. Shake loose soil off the roots. Then pry the plant apart, with fingers or a sharp knife, and repot each piece.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 328

Have you ever seen those cacti that are plain on the bottom but topped with a different or colorful cactus? You can make your own graft. Pick plants similar in size. Cut with a sharp, clean knife; fit the parts together; and hold them in place with a rubber band or two. They should knit together in a few weeks.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 329

Start flower seeds indoors in flats or pots. Some require light to germinate and must be laid on the surface of a flat of seed-starting mix or sand. Others can be covered lightly. The seed packet will have this information. Then place them in a warm, draft-free spot.

❑ *Check when completed*

JANUARY

Tip 330

Draw up a new plan for your vegetable garden—and aim to rotate crops. If you grow the same thing in the same spot each year, plant-specific pests will know it, hang around, and re-attack, so you want to confuse or thwart them. Also, rotating crops keeps vital soil nutrients from becoming depleted.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 331

Planning a big project or installation this year, such as a new patio or terrace, a water garden, or a pergola? It's not too soon to start researching the idea and getting design ideas, from books, magazines, and the Internet. And if you think you will need some help, line up somebody right now—before his or her calendar fills.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 332

Inspect the yard for winter damage. If a branch or limb is obviously dead—snapped, dry, or blackened—clip or saw it off. Make your cuts flush with the branch bark collar. If you are not sure that a branch is dead, wait a few more weeks. A dormant limb can look dead but still have life in it.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 333

Clean dusty houseplant leaves. Not only is the coating unattractive, but it inhibits the exchange of air and moisture for the plant, which can be bad for its health. Wipe leaves with a soapy sponge, and then rinse with clear water. Dust and dirt can be brushed off textured or fuzzy leaves with a paintbrush or clean make-up brush.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 334

Always water flats and pots of developing seeds from the bottom. Watering from above is too rough—the seeds are so small and fragile that they are easily knocked over or dislodged. Instead, set their container in a slightly larger one of water and let them slurp up the water they need.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 335

Keep ice from förming on your garden pool. If the surface gets covered over completely, gases harmful to overwintering fish and plants become trapped. Luckily, all you have to do to prevent this is float a ball or block of wood in the water. It will bob about and maintain an opening even in freezing weather.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 336

On a mild day, tour the yard and look closely for signs of frost heaving. Freeze-thaw cycles cause entire plant rootballs, especially of newer plants and shrubs, to rise above the ground, sometimes at alarmingly crooked angles. Just push the plants back into place, and mulch or remulch them to prevent it from happening again.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 337

Find out your area's predicted last frost-free date. Check your local paper, or call a garden center or nearby Cooperative Extension office. Though it's usually not till April or May, depending where you live, you need to know now so you can calculate when to start certain seeds indoors—seeds you plan to set outside after the last frost.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 338

Sharpen your cutting tools. This means pruners, clippers, and loppers, of course, but also shovels and hoes. Use a file and restore the original bevel. There is no need for a razor-sharp edge, just smooth the nicks. If the tool is unwieldy, hold it in place with a vise grip while you work. When finished, store the tools in a cool, dry place.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 339

If you haven't done so already, service your lawn mower. Clean off the entire surface, above and below. Then, drain the gas, change the oil, and sharpen the blades before returning the machine to storage. You'll be congratulating yourself for taking the time now when you need it to be in top running condition come spring.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 340

Note weather and garden events on your calendar or in your garden journal. Record animal and bird activities, as well as early signs of plant life. If you get into this habit, you'll find the information really useful in the years to come, when you are looking for patterns or want to get an early start on an outdoor project.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 341

Have the seeds you started indoors begun to poke their heads up? When the first true set of leaves appears (technically the second set; the leaves look different from the first, lowest ones), use a small pair of sharp scissors to thin out smaller or weaker seedlings right at soil level.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 342

Inventory your garden supplies to see whether you are running low on anything. Garden stores are already restocking, and though it seems a bit premature, there's no harm in going shopping now to get what you anticipate needing—pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, soil amendments, stakes, plant labels, maybe even a new tool or two.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 343

If your orchids aren't blooming, or have inflorescences with buds that haven't yet opened, the wait can be excruciating. Nudge things along by feeding the plants once a month with orchid fertilizer (diluted according to the label directions). Raising the temperature or humidity may also help, depending on the type of orchid.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 344

A sure cure for cabin fever is a homemade terrarium. Any good-sized glass container will do; a former aquarium is perfect. Spread an inch or two of slightly damp sphagnum moss in the bottom, top with sand, and plant little plants. Ferns, baby's tears, and peperomias are fine choices.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 345

Pamper a Valentine's bouquet of roses so it will last as long as possible. To do this, prepare a vase of lukewarm water and stir in the preservative powder from the florist. Then recut the stems on an angle (to increase water uptake). Set the arrangement in a cool room overnight to plump up. Then display in a bright room.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 346

After a snowstorm, help your hedges by brushing off the snow with a broom. If you don't do this, the weight may snap or kill the branches. Sometimes, the entire plant can get pushed askew and will then look misshapen when spring returns. Allow ice on the stems to melt on its own.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 347

Did you take photographs of your garden last year? Now is a good time to gather them, group them by season, and maybe even put them in a small album. Just looking at them will cheer you up on a wintry day and inspire new ideas for the coming spring.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 348

It's time to start some houseplant cuttings. Water the plant the night before. Cut young shoots, about 3 or 4 inches long, and dip their cut ends in hormone rooting powder (available at any garden supplier). Then stick them in a flat or pot of moist, sterile, soilless mix. Cover with plastic, and place in a warm spot.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 349

Go shopping and treat yourself to a new pair of gardening gloves! Try them on first to be sure they are comfortable and that you can move your fingers and wrists easily. If you are really in the mood to splurge, get calfskin ones—they'll serve you well for years to come.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 350

Prepare your orders to mail-order plant nurseries. Even if you are phoning in the order, fill out the order blank that comes with the catalog so you'll have the product code numbers and prices handy. Read the fine print about shipping costs and timing, and the replace-or-refund policy, just in case.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 351

Those seedlings you've been raising in flats may be ready to move to the next step. Fill individual pots with moistened, sterile potting mix. Then carefully transplant the seedlings to the pots. Set these in a bright spot, or better still, provide around fourteen hours a day of artificial light.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 352

Check on all your developing seedlings. Remember to water before feeding, or at the same time, so the roots can take up the nutrients. If the seedlings are leaning towards the light source, move the pots a quarter turn each day to encourage the stems to grow upright.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 353

Start some perennials from seeds (purchased locally or via mail-order). A few that sprout and grow readily are hollyhocks, phlox, and mums. Now is a good time to find some new colors in these common plants—seed houses tend to have broader selections than you'll see later in the spring at the garden center.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 354

If you're growing Lenten roses, also called by their Latin name, *Helleborus*, they may be starting to poke up their heads, snow or not. Check that they are not being smothered by mulch or snow, and pinch off tattered growth to make way for new stems and leaves—and soon, those glorious flowers.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 355

Did you have any leftover bulbs when you planted last fall? You might try potting them now. Give them a little water and warmth, and some indirect light. If you're lucky, they'll oblige by sprouting. Pots of blooming bulbs offer such cheer around the house on gray winter days.

❑ *Check when completed*

Tip 356

Stop by the garden center to see whether they are unloading the last of the paper-white narcissus and amaryllis bulbs. You may get a real deal, and there's no reason you can't bring them home, pot them, and get them growing. There's still lots of time to enjoy their unique beauty (and in the case of the paper-whites, wonderful fragrance).

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 357

Want some free shrubs and trees? It's not hard to propagate your own from hardwood cuttings started this time of year. Take slender pieces of stem about a foot long. Prepare flats or bags of vermiculite (available at garden centers), and store the cuttings, cut side down, until spring.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 358

Some of your bushes and trees, as well as your roses, may have suckers emerging from the roots. (Rose suckers are below the graft.) These are easier to spot this time of year. Cut them off cleanly at ground level with sharp loppers so they never have a chance to start growing and stealing energy from the main plant.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 359

Start cool-weather vegetables such as broccoli and its relatives. These need time to become sturdy seedlings so they can be the first ones out into the garden when winter is over but before hot weather arrives (they do poorly in hot weather). Try to start them six to eight weeks before you plan to transplant.

❑ *Check when completed*

FEBRUARY

Tip 360

Expand your resource base by adding a book to your library. Cool Springs Press specializes in state and regional gardening books. Visit **www.coolspringspress.net** or check out the list in the back of this book!

❑ *Check when completed*

Appendix

Plant Inventory/History

name _____

when planted _____

where planted _____

size _____

source _____

price _____

name _____

when planted _____

where planted _____

size _____

source _____

price _____

Plant Inventory/History

name _____

when planted _____

where planted _____

size _____

source _____

price _____

name _____

when planted _____

where planted _____

size _____

source _____

price _____

Plant Inventory/History

name _____

when planted _____

where planted _____

size _____

source _____

price _____

name _____

when planted _____

where planted _____

size _____

source _____

price _____

Plant Inventory/History

name _____

when planted _____

where planted _____

size _____

source _____

price _____

name _____

when planted _____

where planted _____

size _____

source _____

price _____

Plant Inventory/History

name _____

when planted _____

where planted _____

size _____

source _____

price _____

name _____

when planted _____

where planted _____

size _____

source _____

price _____

Plant Inventory/History

name _____

when planted _____

where planted _____

size _____

source _____

price _____

name _____

when planted _____

where planted _____

size _____

source _____

price _____

Today In My Garden

Today In My Garden

Today In My Garden

Today In My Garden

My Favorite Sources

My Favorite Sources

Other Great Books

Month-by-Month Gardening Series in:	ISBN
Mid-Atlantic	1-59186-048-2
New England	1-59186-107-1
New Jersey	1-59186-110-1
New York	1-59186-111-X
Pennsylvania	1-59186-252-3

From Cool Springs Press!

Gardener's Guide Series in:	ISBN
Mid-Atlantic	1-93060-499-8
New England	1-93060-449-1
New Jersey	1-59186-067-9
New York	1-59186-065-2
Pennsylvania	1-93060-479-3

And that's not all; visit **www.coolspringspress.net** to read about some of our other books!

Managing Editor: Billie Brownell
Cover and Interior Design: Bruce Gore, Gore Studios
Tip Writer: Teri Dunn
Production Design: S.E. Anderson

TODAY *in My* GARDEN

Today in My Garden is a handy, pocket-sized book of daily tips and reminders aimed at novice and more experienced gardeners alike! It's a collection of monthly "things to do," grouped by seasons, as well a the ultimate check-off list. Unlike traditional calenda you can start using *Today in My Garden* at any time; just begin at the current month and use the reminders as your gardening guide. If you like, check off tasks as you complete them—it's a great feeling! And, it's the perfect gift for yourself or anyone else, year-round!

ISBN-13: 978-1-59186-339-7
ISBN-10: 1-59186-339-2

51099
7 89172 00204 2
UPC

51099
9 781591 863397
EAN

$10.99 US.

Gardening / Regional / New England

Cool Springs Press